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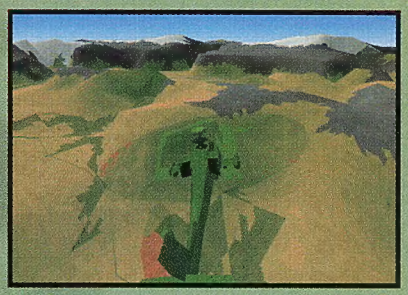

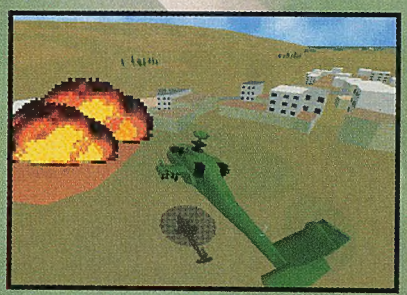

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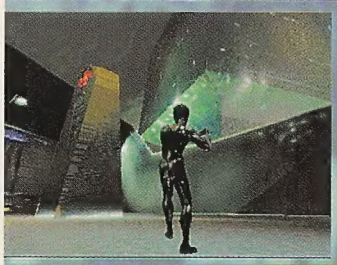

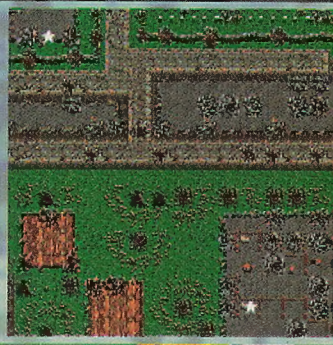

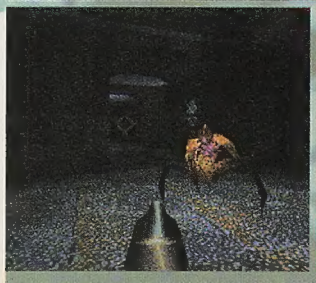

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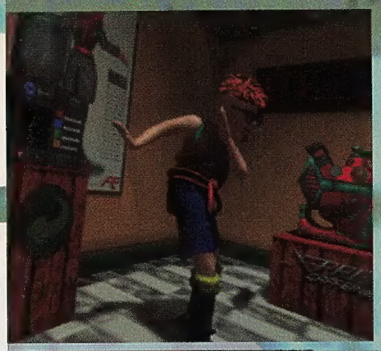

review ratings

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Good	★★★☆☆
Fair	★★☆☆☆
Why?	★☆☆☆☆

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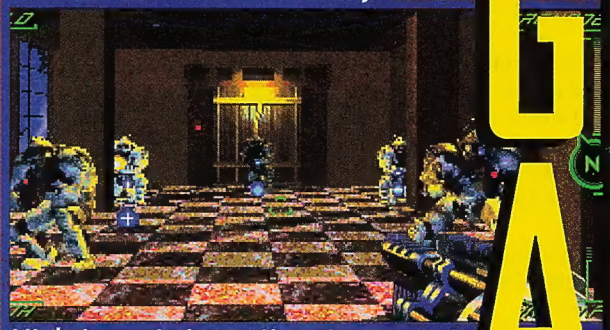

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All kinds of fun

Or why more gamers should read Dante's Inferno

Will the *Quake* vs. *Nukem* debate have died down by the time you're reading this? Probably not. Do you even know (or care) what it's all about? No? Tempest in a tea-pot, like most everything people get stirred up about in gaming. Fun, though.

If you've been reading these pages for awhile, or even if you've just picked up this issue as your first copy ever of the magazine, you'll have to come to an inevitable conclusion after about five minutes of scanning: there are as many different definitions of fun in the medium of computer gaming as there are people playing them.. almost. You see this if you're far enough away from it all to have a little perspective. Most of us closely involved and interested tend to lose sight of that perspective with alarming frequency.

The strange thing is – at a time when most of the ideas about what you can do in any of the genres of gaming are still only partly-formed – various factions in the audience tend to get *really* rigid and vociferous about what's "cool" and what's not, what's right and what's wrong in a computer game. Not in a moral sense, even; just at the level of what's fun. It's okay for people to care seriously about their fun, sure, but the ratio of heat to light in ongoing discussion of what's valuable is often rather severely weighted in favor of the former. More enlightenment, less hot air, please.

As has almost always been the case with the audience for computer gaming, the publicly evolving definition of fun tends to come from two, mutually opposed, extremist camps. On one side exist people who've never seen an original idea they didn't absolutely hate. Anything unfamiliar, untested, presented without a collective stamp of grunting approval, is to be cast into the Pit of Software Hell (preferably at a substantial discount price, so late at night, while no-one's looking, they can sample such goodies without risk). On the other side is a crowd who will scream rip-off at the slightest indication a good idea's been used more than once a decade, who shout for *more* innovation, *more* ground-breaking design, *more* jaw-dropping splendor, all of which they spend fifteen minutes with to make sure their computer's fast enough and compatible enough to handle, after which it's on to the next long, sad, jaded wait until the *ultimate* original computer game finally arrives.

This Game Player Inferno breaks down into ever-more-specialized sub-components, kind of like a bad nightmare version of a Microsoft Foundation Class (don't know what that is, either? Lucky you!); so that you get the people who won't give a game ten minutes of their precious time unless it's all texture-mapped polygons, the people who sit by the screen nervously measuring draw-in and far-clipping and oh etc., the people who judge everything based solely on the quality of the explosions, the people who won't play a game unless they're promised it'll last longer than their pet Blue Macaw, the people who leap desperately from hardware upgrade to software purchase, forever climbing the ladder towards the constantly receding goal of smooth frame rate at maximum detail; the people who won't buy a game unless it has a mouse interface, the people who want fully programmed macro files for every conceivable sophisticated peripheral to ship with the software, the people who want cheat codes in the software, the people who can't refuse using cheat codes if they're there and wish they were taken out prior to ship… and I won't even mention the historical/simulation grognards, clinging feverishly to some absolute *fact*(oid) they just picked out of some chain bookstore bargain table special to pounce up and down upon when they find out some software designer decided to give some weapon system 10 feet more trajectory than it supposedly historically/realistically had/has…

Somebody should invent a game some day which features levels upon levels of Software Hell, within which various types of frustrated gamers lurk hopelessly, waiting for an outsider to drop by and help them find their way. Heck, maybe it's already out there and I just haven't seen it yet.

It would all be just amusing and fine, were it not for the fact that unfortunately there are times when *years* of good, careful work by dedicated people gets pushed aside, simply because it failed to squeak into one of the tiny, little pigeonholes relegated this week for that kind of game. It's definitely someone's idea of Hell to try to put together a project which takes three years from conception to completion, at the end of which the fate of said project is determined by a process which plays out more like *Robotron* than anything else.

Oh well; both *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D* are fabulous games, actually, this from a person who prefers a sophisticated air combat sim or, better yet, a complex, turn-based historical wargame. Stretch a little; find it in your heart to step a little out of your own little circle in Software Hell. Buy 'em both and decide for yourself.

– Steve Wartofsky, Editor

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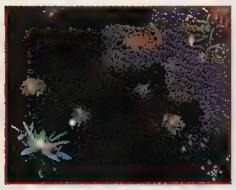
A futuristic facelift

Blizzard reworks Starcraft *to make it look less like orcs in space*

A complaint Blizzard heard quite often during and after the E3 show this May was that "*Starcraft* is just *Warcraft II* in space!" While some of these complaints were faulty (the *Starcraft* design already had three races that–unlike those found in *Warcraft II*–differed quite a bit), the visuals being shown in Los Angeles did seem very reminiscent of the earlier games. In an attempt to please gamers (and, perhaps, reviewers), the folks at Blizzard have put in some late hours completely reworking the graphic look of the game and adding new gameplay elements.



◀ Orcs in space no more. Starcraft before...

▼ ...and after its graphical facelift

The graphics now have more of a rendered look with an angled perspective (ironically making the game closer in visuals to competitors *Dominion* and *7th Legion*). In terms of gameplay, Blizzard has added new kinds of missions to the original grow-your-platforms-in-space concept; you will now find yourself with planet-based combat and space-station like explorations (rather like the dungeons in the original *Warcraft*). – *Scott Udell*

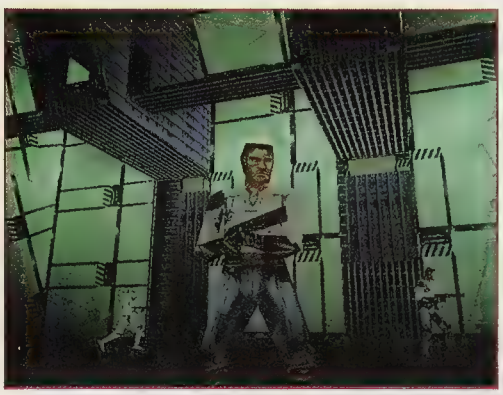
Ground combat has been added as well, and also shows off the considerably improved visuals

The return of the Jedi

Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II *is the logical evolution of the Star Wars® license*

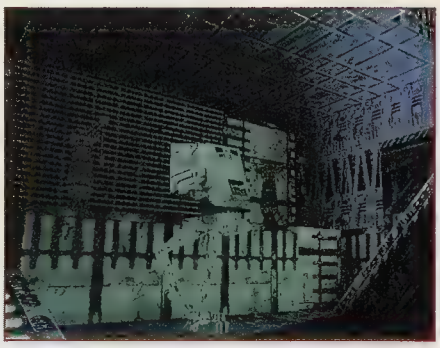
Kyle Katarn is your average mercenary. One day, he decides he wants to be a Jedi Knight. As he starts to discover his past (Luke's brother?), he must stop seven Dark Jedi from unlocking the powers of a Jedi burial ground. As Kyle chooses between the Light and Dark side of the Force, his actions will have great implications on events in the entire galaxy.

So goes the story for LucasArts' *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*. LucasArts was sorta cheating when they demonstrated the game at the Electronic Entertainment Expo. They were showing it on a 166MHz Pentium equipped with a Rendition 3D accelerator card, so if it *hadn't* looked awesome, there would have been public outcry. However, the recently released screenshots give a more realistic indication of what gamers with normal computers should expect of this game – yup, it's *Quake Forces*. It looks as if LucasArts will deliver the 3D sophistication of *Quake* with the added advantage of that little *Star Wars* license.



It's polygon city. Check out those Stormtroopers in the background

Jedi Knight, more so than *Dark Forces*, really immerses the player in the *Star Wars* mythology. All of the things players were denied in *Dark Forces* are present here. Players can wield the mighty lightsaber, call upon the Force to give them that little oomph (space-age, or is that new-age, steroids). Use of the Force is based on experience points, which increase as the player completes missions. Powers include enhanced jumping, X-ray vision, healing powers and the ability to retrieve weapons (think Luke on Hoth grabbing his lightsaber and slaying the beast).



The environments are complex, and dare we say it *Quake*-like

Once again, there will be 12 missions for the player to complete, and network play is part of the design. Eight player play will be supported in cooperative or combat modes, and a territorial combat mode will allow players to play a version of "Capture the Flag." Unfortunately, the fun won't start until 1997. – *Steve Bauman*

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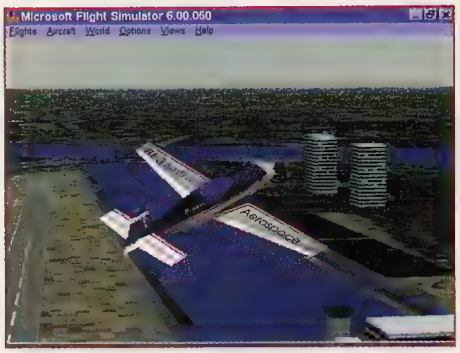
BRIEFS

Catware and SSI ponder *Aden General* A recent scan of the web page of Catware (developers for SSI of their upcoming *Star General*) yielded a single phrase sitting unadorned: *Aden General*. While there was no more information on-line, we were able to confirm with SSI that Catware is tinkering with a strategy game set in SSI's fantasy land of Aden. Don't get excited yet, however–SSI says this isn't an official project and that it's certainly not on their development schedule... **Really really fast graphics** – Diamond Multimedia has announced that they will support Intel's new Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) interface specification. First reported on in the June issue, this technology should revolutionize graphics. It allows video to share main memory, and eliminates the bus as a video-speed bottleneck. Expect serious 3D performance when these things hit the street in the middle of 1997... **Gotta get more of that Civ 2** – MicroProse will release a scenario disk for *Civilization II*, which should guarantee more sleepless nights until the year 2000...**Hardball 6 in 3D** – In a move that should suprise no one, Accolade's next *Hardball* will feature 3D stadiums and characters. It'll be out in 1997... **GT Interactive buying the world** – Following Microsoft's and Sierra's leads in buying every company in existence, GT Interactive has purchased WizardWorks, Formgen (retail distributors of *Duke Nukem 3D*) and Humongous Entertainment, the producers of the utterly brilliant *Putt-Putt, Freddy Fish* and *Fatty Bear* series of kids games... **Sega gets hammered** – SegaSoft has formed a new brand, called Jack Hammer (quit laughing–we don't make these names up). Their first releases will be three, and we quote, "non-stop action titles," *Three Dirty Dwarves, Metal Werks* (formerly with Sanctuary Woods) and *Emperor of the Fading Suns*. Wait, you say, isn't *Emperor* a turn-based strategy game first show a few months ago in this very magazine? Yup... I guess this shows Sega's knowledge of the PC market... **More golf** – Looking Glass Technologies is working on a computer golf game called *British Open Golf*. The game will include two courses, St Andrews and Royal Troon. Looking Glass is trying to capture the prestige and history of the British Open and combine them with a state of the art computer golf model, including caddies with built-in AI, weather that influences game play, and realistic ball physics... **Sierra's online plans** - Sierra will utilize Intel's Internet Phone Technology on their Sierra Internet Gaming System (SIGS), allowing gamers to voice chat while gaming over the 'net. SIGS is Windows '95 specific and offers chat rooms and gamer profiles to help you hook up with opponents...

The safer and friendlier skies

Microsoft teams with FlightSafety International

In an attempt to bolster the realism in *Flight Simulator 6.0*, Microsoft has signed up with FlightSafety International to provide content and flight training. FlightSafety will also have the exclusive right for five years to develop Microsoft-approved add-on products to provide realistic flight training experiences to *Flight Simulator* fans you know who you are).



Windows 95 is the new home for the worlds most popular flight simulator

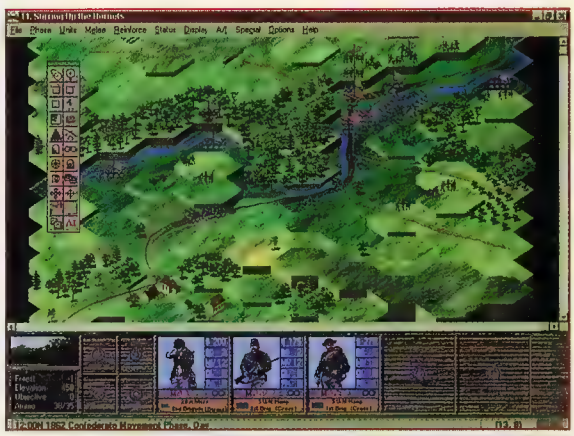
Another effect of such an add-on is that it provides more value for a product that could be be perceived by flyers as *Flight Simulator 5.1 for Windows 95*. This change, among others will according to Ed Fries, General Manager of the Entertainment Business Unit at Microsoft, "allow us to continue our goal to deliver the most realistic flight experience on the PC."

The current release date for *Flight Simulator 6.0* is November 7th, 1996. This will be the first time in the products 13-year history that it's available for Microsoft's flagship operating system, Windows. – *Steve Bauman*

TalonSoft stays afloat

Antietam's next, then they attack the high seas

Just as we were going to press TalonSoft made available this first image from the next game in their *Battleground* series, *Antietam*. Covering what is generally regarded as "the bloodiest single day in American history," the game will let you fight the whole battle or specific scenarios such as "The Sunken Road," "The Cornfield!", and "Burnside's Bridge." Continuing the trend started with *Battleground: Shiloh*, at least one smaller, independent battle will also be recreated.



An early mock-up of Battleground Antietam

For fans of the high seas TalonSoft is coming out with *Age of Sail*. This first real-time version of the *Battleground* engine will cover the period from 1775 to 1820, with small one-on-one engagements like that between the *Constitution* and England's *Guerriere* on up to the huge Battle of Trafalgar between England and Spain. There will also be a campaign game that'll let you rise from Cadet to Admiral in any of four different navies, and a scenario editor will (finally!) be reintroduced into the series. – *Scott Udell*

Electronic Arts enters the hall of fame

Showing the further blurring of the real- and video-game worlds, the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame has teamed with Electronic Arts to produce an exhibit on interactive basketball video games.

The exhibit traces computer basketball from the 8-bit floppy disk days to the current CD-ROM console and PC titles. Games exhibited include the seminal Apple, Atari and Commodore 64 game *Julius Erving and Larry Bird Go One-on-One* and a making-of video of *NBA Live '97*, with Dream Teamer Mitch Richmond showing how motion capture works. The display also features an area called "Pros Who Play," which shows players like Joe Smith, Damon Stoudamire, Tim Hardaway and Bryant Reeves indulging in nerd-like behavior.

The hall is located in Springfield, Massachusetts. The exhibit opened in July and is a permanent display. – *Steve Bauman*

Test Drive: Off Road

An old-time favorite gets down and dirty

Ah, the appeal of driving cars you'll never be able to own. That's always been the biggest appeal of Accolade's *Test Drive* series of games. The originals allowed you to drive exotic Lamborghinis and Ferraris. It seems appropriate that this new version, *Test Drive: Off-Road* features SUVs (sport-utility vehicles), the station wagon of the 90s, and the fastest growing segment of the American car market.

The vehicles players will have to pick from include the Hummer, Land Rover Defender 90 (no Range Rover?), Jeep Wrangler (the Wrangler sounds are Bill Linn of Accolade's personal Jeep, recorded out in the rough. That's his skids, too – screams were presumably filtered out) and the Chevrolet K-1500 Z71. There are 12 tracks to tromp all over, with dirt, sand and snow environments. Multiplayer play will be included (of course), with split-screen, modem and network play for up to four players.

All of the fun of off-roading without having to wash the mud out of your front seat

Initial impressions of the game lead you to believe that they're definitely working on an arcade game, but one that has a good off-road feel a la *Sega Rally*. Of course if they really wanted a modern SUV off-road racing game, they would have had the races in a shopping mall ("get that parking space, dodge that shopping cart, jump the island."). – *Steve Bauman*

Trilobyte goes Analog - The makers of *7th Guest* and *11th Hour* have formed a new online division devoted to the development of Internet products. Their first game will be *Assault!*, a 3D tank game playable over the Internet... **Sirtech goes intergalactic** – Sirtech has reached an agreement with Engineering Animation, Inc. to develop an online 3D multiplayer game for the Internet, sora like their own *Deadly Games*, which is the latest to appear on the TEN network... **Online connection** – Mpath Interactive and Catapult Entertainment have merged. Mpath, whose MPlayer Internet service is still "on the way," gains the subscriber base from Catapult's XBAND network, and also links to console-based online gaming. Mpath also has *Quake* on an exclusive basis. And XBAND has *Star Control 3*. Now if only one of these stupid online services would actually open... **Engage engages more cool cash** – Interplay's online service (which, by the way, will be free, unlike TEN, Mpath, and XBAND) Engage has its first investor, the enormous Japanese investment group Softbank. Softbank is an invester in Yahoo, Inc., US Web, Cybercash, Inc. and owns Ziff-Davis, publisher of *Computer Gaming World* (among others) and the Sendai Publishing Groups... ■

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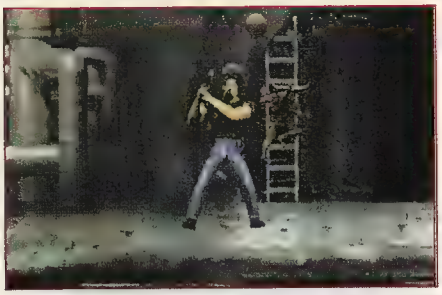
Hunter Hunted

It's kill or be killed in Sierra's side-scrolling action fest

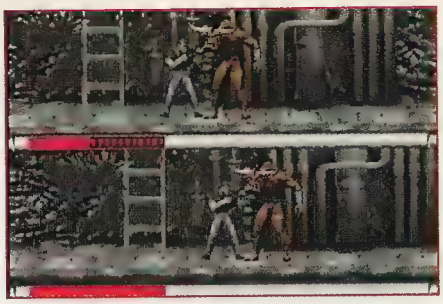
The side scrolling platform game will never die – it just keeps getting more violent. Sierra has decided to enter this arena with *Hunter Hunted*, an action game in the style of Crack Dot Com's *Abuse*. While it is similar in look and feel, it lacks that game's high level of carnage. Instead, the intelligent creatures who chase the player through over 50 graphically detailed levels give the game a more subtle (if that could possibly be the right word for an action game) level of tension and imminent danger. You find that you're not only worrying about the next room, but also wondering if someone is going to jump your back.



The Z-plane feature allows you to see things going on in the background

The feeling of tension is further enhanced by the game's main innovation – a unique "Z-plane" feature where the player, and computer-controlled characters, can enter sections of the screen (the Z axis), discovering new rooms. You can also see other characters in these gaps in the walls, allowing you to make secret attacks (they can't see you when you're in front of them).

The plot (such as it is) is similar to any fighting game. Some alien gets a bunch of creatures and plops them down in a maze of rooms. May the best beast win. You control Jake, a humanoid and (as usual) the hunted, or a Minotaur-like alien, who's the hunter. Two players can play at the same computer via split screen (fast computers only need apply), and modem play may also happen (not likely in the shipping version), allowing four players to compete (two on each machine).



Split screen play. If modem play gets added, it could support four player over one modem

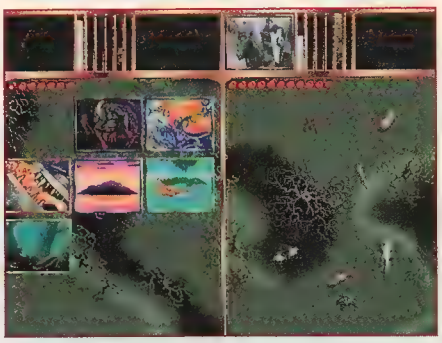
There's something to be said for solid design in an established genre. *Hunter Hunted* looks like unpretentious, old-fashioned carnage for sadists of all ages. – *Steve Bauman*

Magic: The Gathering

Riding a wave of enthusiasm into strategy game realms

Yes, I know you're bound to be confused, saying "Didn't *CGS+* just run a full feature on the *Magic* game last issue?" Well, yes, we did, but that title, based on the popular card game, is from MicroProse; *this* one is coming to us from Acclaim, and appears to be taking a different approach to bringing a touch of *Magic* to your computer screen. While the folks at Acclaim are still being pretty tight with information on the game (apparently due to licensing restrictions imposed by Wizards of the Coast), we were able to squeeze some screenshots out of them along with a basic description of the game.

Whereas the MicroProse approach to playing *Magic* on your computer is to use a larger enveloping adventure game to wrap around the idea of *Magic* duels, Acclaim's game will apparently use a strategy metaphor to set up the duels and, to add even more gameplay, give the players tactical battles underneath the duel play. In other words, when players lay out their cards for a particular turn in a duel, things won't automatically happen; instead, they'll be given units–creatures, beings, objects, and so forth–based on those cards that they will then have to command in tactical situations set up by that round of dueling. – *Scott Udell*



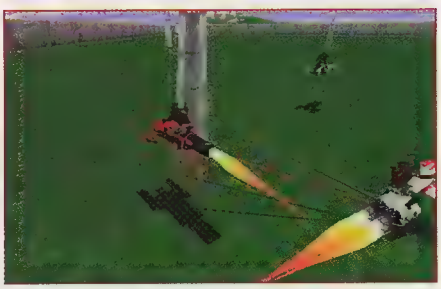
Watch your Magic cards come to life

Rocket Jockey

When it really pays to have balls (or tires)

Set in a time that never was is *Rocket Jockey*, a multiplayer action game from Rocket Science Games. The main vehicle is a somewhat primitive rocket, very similarly to a cycle. Clad in a sort of 30's or 40's retro style of clothing, the player may choose from a cornucopia of rockets which have different abilities in the areas of speed, handling, etc., and from a number of jockeys — one female (gasp!) and a few different males, with different strengths and weaknesses of his or her own. One needn't worry about initial vehicle choices, however, since you can steal a different rocket the moment you are able to wrench it from between the quivering thighs of one of your opponents.

This is actually a *trio* of games: *Rocket Wars*, set in an arena where the last guy left is the winner (kinda like *Spartacus*), in which the object is to get all of your opponents tied up or attached to pylons; *Rocket Racing*, a slalom-type race where you're up against the clock as you try to beat your opponents through various gate structures; and *Rocket Ball*, combining elements of soccer and polo, where you'll be picking up balls and other objects (such as old tires) and tossing them into goals. *Many* balls are involved: beach balls, lead balls, footballs, good balls, bad balls...but *tetherball* may be more apropos, since the key tool or weapon in all of these games is a cable or grappling hook, which you can shoot out of either side of your rocket. It will whip around post structures, allowing you to make sharp turns, scoop up items, or tether your opponent. A variety of cables will be available from boioioing rubber band style to barbed wire (ouch).



Here come the paratroopers

A sophisticated physics model is designed to simulate maneuvers before, during and after damage has been incurred; and speaking of damage, we are assured that no graphic depiction of damages will occur. "Shucks!," say *Duke Nukem* enthusiasts. Look for one of the demo discs to be offered to potential subscribers by TEN this fall. *Rocket Jockey* will be included; you can then see for yourself. – *Cindy Yans*

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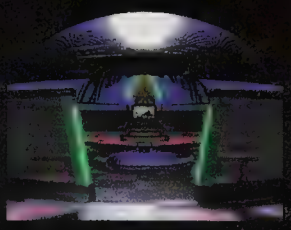

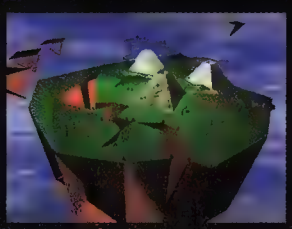

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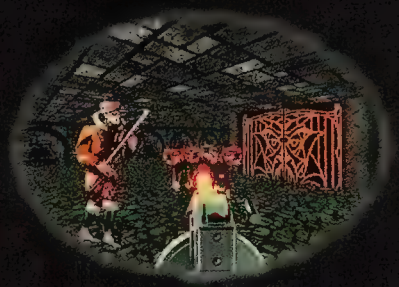
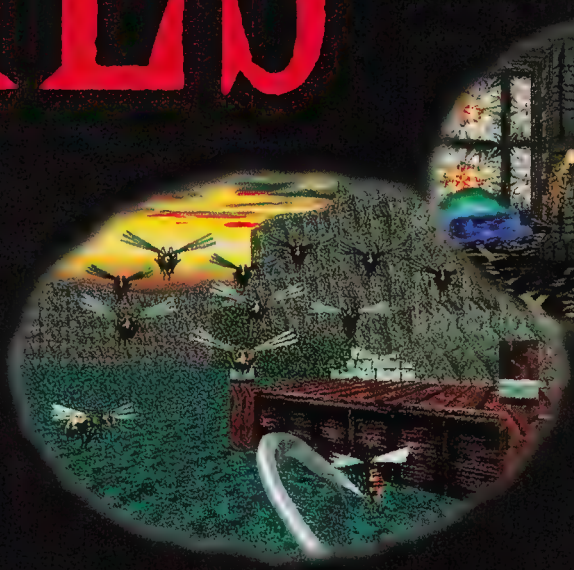


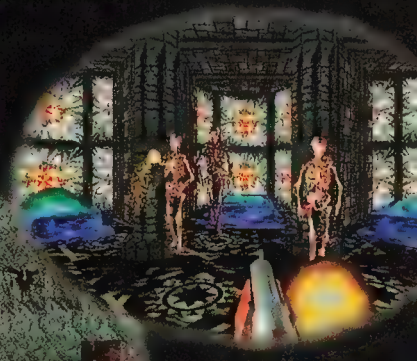
paranormal puzzles

A sophisticated shooter laced with dark humor, Killing Time™ is a fright-fest for the true aficionado

gallows humor

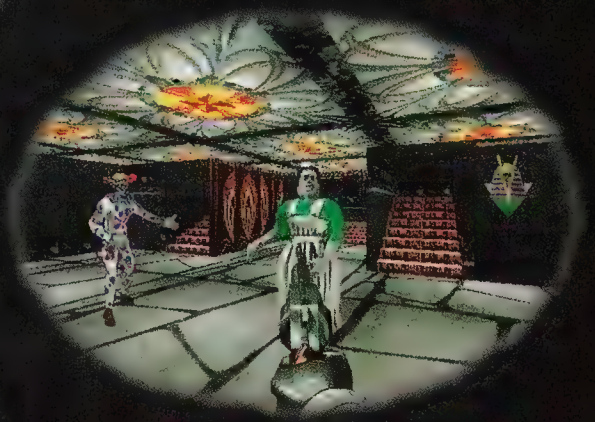
of first-person corridor mayhem.





You're trapped – locked in an island mansion crawling with the undead. Clear heads with a penchant for puzzle solving must prevail.

supernatural storyline



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Out of the Shadows

Origin shows off the seedier side of space with Privateer 2: the Darkening

by Steve Bauman

Wing Commander is more famous, but *Privateer* is perhaps the most beloved of Origin's space operas. While it is as story-driven as any Origin product, its non-linear gameplay is more immersive, because it allows the player to explore the world on their own terms. If *Wing Commander* is the game where players can be Luke Skywalker (both figuratively and literally), then *Privateer* lets you play Han Solo; and what person who saw *Star Wars* didn't want to be Han? Luke is a dweeb – Han is cool.

More of a hard-core game than *Wing Commander*, *Privateer 2: the Darkening* is Origin's latest cinematic extravaganza, boasting stars, special effects and superb artwork but featuring more varied gameplay elements than its more rigid brother. It stars Clive Owens as the player character, and there's a lot of filmed action to set up the gameplay. Fortunately, it doesn't overwhelm the game, which has been a problem with the last couple of *Wing Commander* games.

The filmed parts of the game look quite professional, and quite English. There's a certain atmosphere to them, a combination of the styles of Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*) and Terry Gilliam (*12 Monkeys*, *Brazil*), with a smidgen of *Dr. Who* thrown in for sort of a retro-futuristic look (and a lot of that legendary Gilliam ductwork). There are also a lot of smoke-filled rooms, weird camera angles and a sense of the loneliness of your character (lots of long shots showing the isolation of your character from your surroundings). But you're not watching a movie; you're playing a game. So here's the game.

That amnesia thing

Compared to the overall game design and structure, the basic plot elements are a bit disappointing; they lack originality. The game starts with the crash of a spaceship, a transport ship carrying you as its primary cargo. It occurs near the Mendra port. Unfortunately, you're not quite so sure who you are. The tag on your cryopod says your name is Lev Arris, but you're not clear about what's going on. You also learn that the destroyed ship, the Canera, was attacked by rogue fighters. But why were you the only survivor?

Recuperating in the hospital, you're kidnapped, and your doctor is killed in the ensuing melee. As your kidnappers attempt to put you on a ship, a couple of assassins interrupt your little get-together, and proceed to confuse you even more. You end up on a ship to the Hermes system, and start to wonder what you should do.

Well, you do what any self-respecting citizen would do – head for the ATM. You discover that you have a really good credit rating. Enough credit, in fact, to buy a ship, outfit it with a few weapons and determine your fate. Will you become a mercenary for hire, a bounty hunter, a guardian of transport ships, a trader, a pirate? Or will you track down whatever leads you may have to your real identity and try to get to the bottom of it all?

It's this sort of flexibility that gives *The Darkening* its edge over the *Wing Commander* series of games. You can ignore the plot and video and get a lot out of the game. Set up some trade routes, hire a cargo ship and some pilots to guard it, then watch the money roll in. Fly around the galaxy assassinating fighters or liberating planets. It's up to you.

Whichever way you play, you'll bump into some characters along the way who will feed you information. In true adventure game fashion, you'll talk to people who will tell you about someone else on another planet. If you visit that person, you may have to retrieve something, but they'll also give you new information. Each of the planets has a series of sub-quests you can choose to participate in; some are relevant, others not. However, you may have to take on some of these in order to get enough money to upgrade your ship to

a level that will allow you to actually win the game.

During your journey, you'll also discover that you represent something to a number of people. People keep mentioning something, or someone, named "Kronos." You'll journey from one end of the galaxy, interacting with stars like Christopher Walken (much much better here than in *Ripper*), John Hurt (in one scene sounding curiously like Eric Idle in the "Nudge nudge" Monty Python sketch) and David Warner, in your quest for your identity. A Personal Digital Assistant will keep track of the various plot threads running through the game, and will also serve as a sort of encyclopedia of game information, giving you the skinny on the characters you come across.

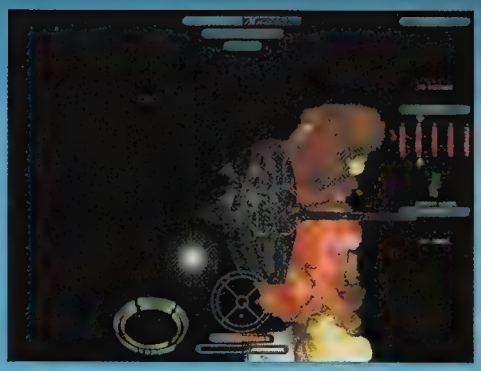
Navigating the world

Much of the richness of the *Privateer* universe is in its *Elite*-style free-form trading and combat mode. This aspect of the game should be familiar to any fan of this whole genre of gaming. You can purchase and upgrade ships, hire transports (a change from the original *Privateer*; you cannot carry cargo on your fighter). The planet screens are livened up by spot animations. One that stands out is a guy waiting at a train station, repeatedly hitting his head on a pipe. This adds a little more character to the stunning rendered backgrounds, which serve as the interface to reaching the various elements of the game world (in typical Origin fashion, clicking on doors leads to other rooms, etc.).

The development of this art – as well as of the interface for buying, selling and trading – is an interesting story. Producer Erin Roberts hired a bunch of non-game playing artists to design the interface, thereby eliminating that generic "game" look. What they've ended up creating is something beautiful – an interface which manages to be incredibly stylish without being obtuse or drawing too much attention to itself. The texturing and organic shapes should be familiar to anyone who's used *Kai's Power Tools*.

The combat engine

Once you enter battle, you get a superb 3D engine, faster than *Wing Commander*'s, with high-resolution graphics and a series of little details setting apart from the pack. The number of combinations of ship enhancements and weapons make battle constantly engaging (and trying to figure out what weapons work with certain types of armor and ships will keep hint book writers in business). Little effects, like lens flares when passing in front of planets (who cares if it wouldn't happen in the real world; it looks cool) and digitized explosions are evidence a lot of care and time was spent on this aspect of the game. Don't spend too much time admiring the explosions, though; you can take damage from their debris.



The combat engine in Privateer is better than that found in the Wing Commander games

There are over 50 times the number of missions in *The Darkening* as are in the original *Privateer* (there's more than 150 or so distinct missions for the player to fly). Some of these will be linked to the plot, with video sequences serving as rewards, but the vast majority are just for lining your pockets or for scoring information. The missions vary from protection to destruction. While you're out making money killing things, you can set up trade routes for your cargo ship, making even more money (make sure you hire some wingmen – it's dangerous out there).

18 ships are available for the player to fly, compared with four in the original. Each has distinct performance characteristics, though you will not get different visual cockpit styles (since there's no cockpit).

The light at the end of the tunnel

Fortunately for gamers, *Privateer 2: The Darkening* is a big enough game that we couldn't possibly cover all of its aspects in a single article. It looks like it has the depth, beauty and gameplay to win over a new generation of gamers, one which has grown accustomed to being blown away with each Origin release.

The original *Privateer*'s reputation has grown over the years. Most gamers consider it one of the best games that Origin ever created, so *The Darkening* had better be pretty damn good, lest they incur the wrath of the angry gamer. It doesn't look like they'll have to worry; *The Darkening* should be high on the list of "must-have" games for the upcoming holiday season.

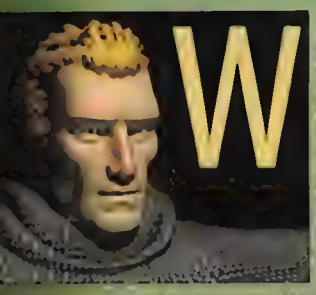
Compare these interior shots from Bex...

... with those from Janus and Hermes.
Just an example of the diversity of the Privateer universe

The whole interface just looks really cool

That Other Franchise

A lot is riding on the next Ultima games. They wouldn't have it any other way



With *The Darkening*, Origin has returned to the *Privateer* universe (finally). New franchises, such as the Jones brand and the *Crusader* games are warming the hearts of gamers everywhere. *Wing Commander IV* was popular enough, and *Wing Commander V* (minus Chris Roberts) is in development somewhere in the bowels of Origin's Austin offices. But what about that other franchise, the one that really made Origin?

Ultima is back. With a vengeance. After spending a day with the producers and directors of *Ultima Online* and *Ultima IX: Ascension*, it's clear that Origin may be able to resurrect the moribund CRPG genre. It's fairly safe to say that *Ultima Online* will become the online event when it opens to the public. People will live online, creating characters, dressing them, taking jobs, creating careers, gossiping in taverns and inns and lord knows what else. The universe is so large (and it has to be, as Origin expects to allow 7,000 people on startup, with more to follow if the demand is there) that it takes over 45 minutes to walk across the city of Britain alone (and 10 hours to traverse the whole game world).

The game is skill-based (rather than experience point based) to keep the game balanced for newbies as well as lifers. Players will be limited to 10 skills at one time. New skills can be added at the cost of another. There will be a notoriety meter to keep track of who's doing what, inns where you can leave bulletin board messages for players (an e-mail system would pull the gamer out of the world), you can build houses, castles, new businesses, run for public office (maybe) – in other words, you can do almost anything with thousands of other human and computer controlled characters to interact with. Richard Garriott (Lord British to *Ultima* fans) was at one point fooled into thinking he was talking to a human, when it was actually one of the computer controlled NPCs (the best way to tell? Computers don't mistype "the" as "hte," and they tend to respond immediately).

Speaking of Garriott, he's been busy directing *Ultima IX: Ascension*. Business kept him from working on *Ultima VII* (also known as *Super Avatar Brothers* for its arcade segments). *Ascension* goes back to old *Ultimas*, but will retain the real-time combat and some of the action-style puzzles involving jumping and climbing. However, the interface will be point and click. Point on a location and you will jump to it.

The overall design will bring the virtues back, and there are fewer black and white issues – everything is more of a shade of gray. There are profoundly important things to do in the game (mostly with saving the world), things that tie everything together. You'll also travel with a party of characters.

Garriott says, "*Ultima IX* is not only the end of the third trilogy (comprising *VII*, *VII*[part] and *IX*), but it reaches back to *Ultima IV* and brings to a close the age of the Avatar. But it will also bring to a close to entire Britannia epoch with characters and elements from the original *Ultimas*."

On the technology front, *Ultima IX* utilizes an all new graphic engine. All previous games utilized a tile- and bitmap-based map, whereas *Ultima IX* uses a polygonal third-person 3D engine. All characters, buildings and almost all of the legendary detailed objects are polygonal (even the foliage). The viewpoint will rotate freely around the area and there will be some zooming in and out for dramatic effect (for conversations it will zoom in; for combat it zooms out for a better view).

When asked whether you'll have to feed your characters (one of the more annoying aspects of *Ultima VII*), Garriott laughed and said, "No characters will eat as long as they have food. However, eventually you will not need food." He wouldn't go into any specific detail of what that means, but the game is called *Ascension*, and the game will deal with the Avatar reaching a new plane of existence. If first looks are any indication, *Ultima IX* may reach a new plane of gaming existence as well. ■

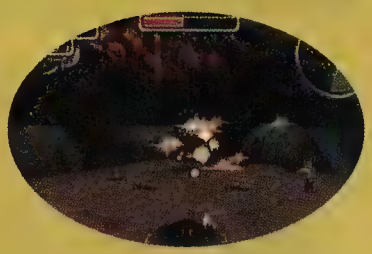
The new 3D engine allows for the detail we've come to expect from an Ultima

These could be computer NPCs - note that there's no typos, and they're not talking about sex

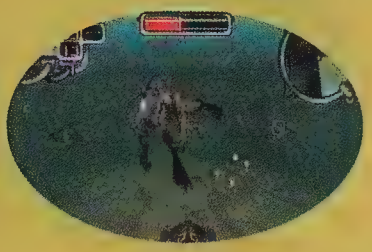
Buy the castle of your dreams. NPC guards will staff it, but beware of break-ins while your going about your normal life

AMOK

ABOVE GROUND



UNDER WATER



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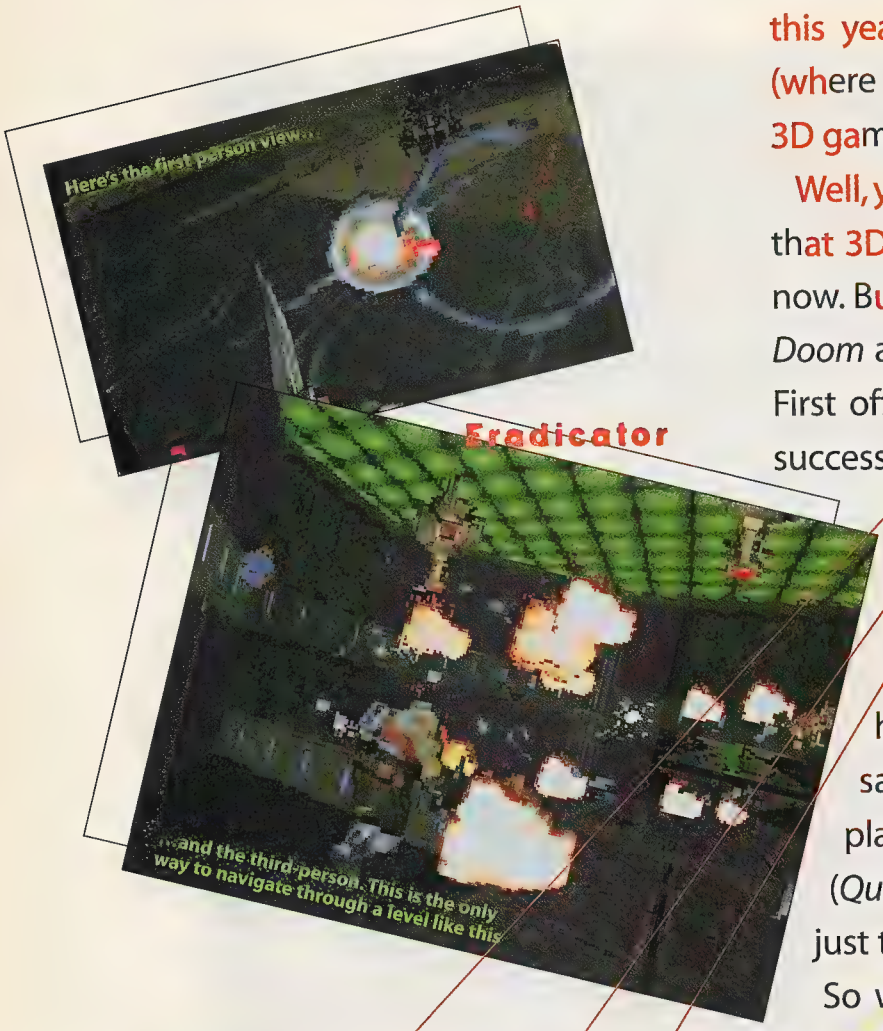
The future's so bright...

by Steve Bauman



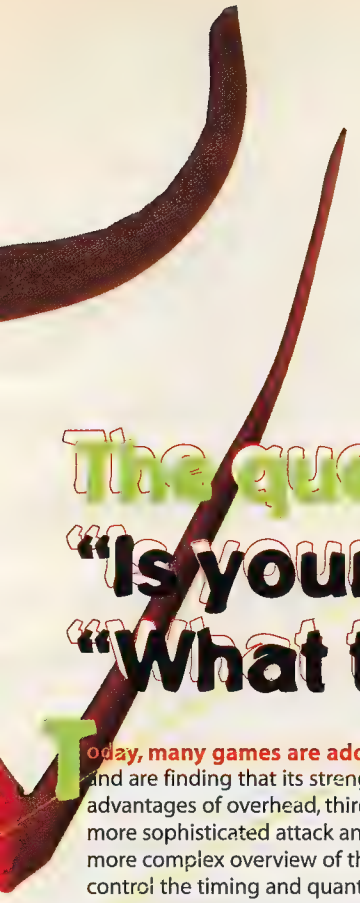
The 3D engine is blazing fast – base machine is a P60 with eight MB of RAM

I have seen the future, and the future is 3D.

"Duh," you say, after reading our report on this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (where there were about three thousand 3D games being displayed).

Well, you're right. It's common knowledge that 3D games are the most popular right now. But everyone's out there trying to do *Doom* again. It isn't going to happen, folks. First off, one of the reasons *Doom* was so successful is because there wasn't anything like it. Now, though, with every other game being a first-person shooter, we're seeing a backlash against all the also-rans. They may have finally reached their audience's saturation point. Gamers are only playing the few really exceptional ones (*Quake*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Descent II*), and just trying the demos of the others.

So what's a 3D game to do? Go third-person, that's what. Put a slightly different twist on things. It may be a subtle change, but consider for a moment what the main benefit of third-person is: an accurate simulation of peripheral vision. You can see a wider field of vision, thus eliminating the tunnel-vision every first-person 3D game forces you into. Flight simulators have been fighting this problem for years, with the virtual cockpit being the most obvious attempt at solving this problem.



The question's not so much as "Is your game 3D?" It's more like, "What type of 3D will it be?"

Today, many games are adopting third-person perspectives, and are finding that its strengths outweigh its weaknesses. The advantages of overhead, third-person 3D are many: you can set up more sophisticated attack and defense situations, you can sustain a more complex overview of the entire tactical situation, you can control the timing and quantity of force from a number of different directions, you can multi-play with better understanding of what your team-mates and opponents are doing, and best of all for computer art fans, you can do much more detailed, various and beautiful characters and environments, with a substantially smaller performance hit than you'd have trying to do it all in first person.

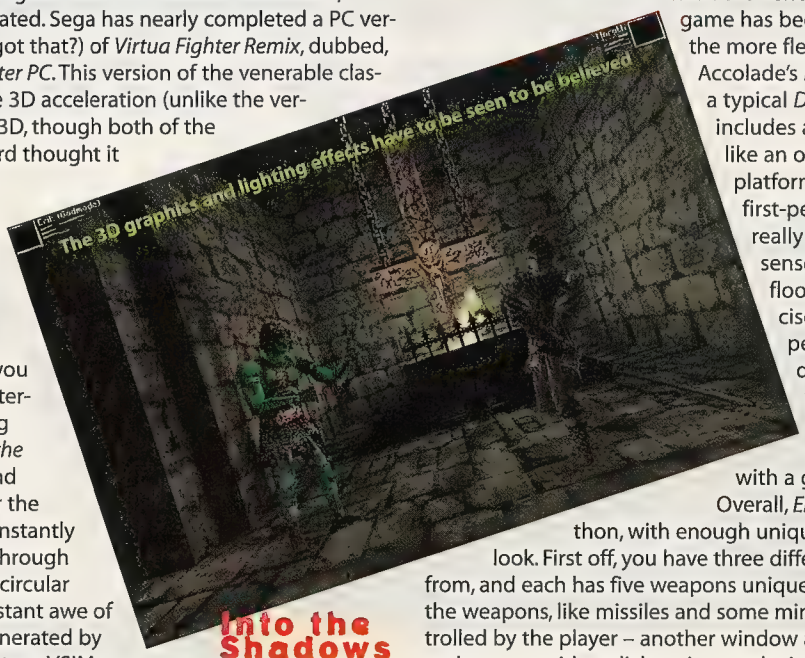
Brawlin' & bickerin'

The most common – and up to this point most successful – implementation of a polygonal third-person environment has been found in the fighting game. *Virtua Fighter* was the *Doom* of the arcade, often imitated, never duplicated. Sega has nearly completed a PC version of the Saturn version (got that?) of *Virtua Fighter Remix*, dubbed, cleverly enough, *Virtua Fighter PC*. This version of the venerable classic will not rely on hardware 3D acceleration (unlike the version for the Diamond Edge 3D, though both of the people who bought that card thought it was superb). Sega is also working on a PC version of *Virtua Cop*, dubbed *Virtua City PD*.

Perhaps the most interesting fighting game is Interplay's wonderfully warped *Die By the Sword*. If you think of it as the ultimate interactive version of the fighting scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* then you won't find yourself too up in arms over the graphic violence. While a constantly moving camera tracks you through the large environments (no circular arena here), you'll be in constant awe of the incredible animation generated by the VSIM motion control system. VSIM generates motion through mathematical equations, allowing unprecedented variation in motion animation.

Finally, there's the legendary vaporware known as *Into The Shadows*. Coded by a bunch of programmers who made their mark in the world of demos, a demo is all that most people have seen of this game. After playing it, it's clear that there's the potential for something really impressive here. The 3D environments are *Quake*-like in their complexity, and the polygonal characters running around are considerably better than those found in *Quake*. Still, you have to wonder if they'll be able to eke any gameplay out of the few CPU cycles remaining from the graphic engine.

For those of you who hate fighting games, get used to them. This is the likely evolution of the CRPG. Think of a game like *Stonekeep* with a true 3D engine and the animation and combat from *Die By the Sword*. This is pure speculation, but it is an intriguing possibility.



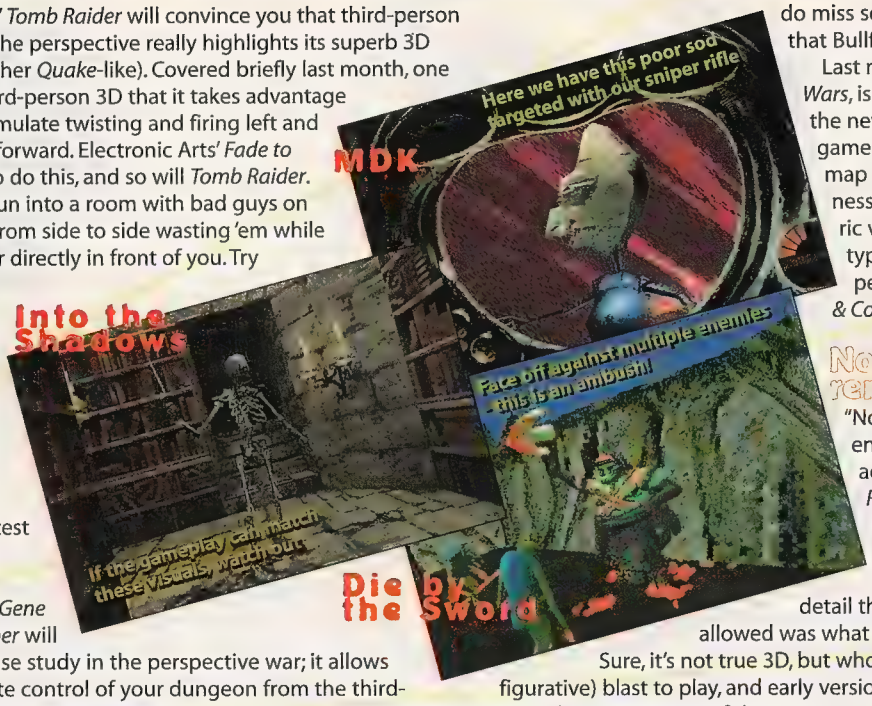
Doomed

Even the venerable first-person action game has been tweaked a bit to facilitate the more flexible external view. Accolade's *Eradicator* can be played like a typical *Doom* game, but the game includes a number of levels designed like an old-fashioned run and jump platform game. Unfortunately, the first-person perspective doesn't really allow the player to get a sense of their relationship to the floor, making jumping an exercise in guesswork (humans' peripheral vision does wonders in the real world, by contrast). Here, *Eradicator*'s third-person mode allows the player to time their jumps with a greater chance of success.

Overall, *Eradicator* is your basic blast-a-thon, with enough unique features to make it worth a look. First off, you have three different characters to choose from, and each has five weapons unique to that character. Some of the weapons, like missiles and some mine-like robots, can be controlled by the player – another window appears in the main screen and you can either click on it to make it the main image or control it in miniature. Unfortunately, the player is defenseless when controlling a weapon. Other features include 24 maps, each with different objectives (as with *Dark Forces*), and a level editor.

The advantages of overhead, third-person 3D are many: you can set up more sophisticated attack you can control the timing and quantity of force from a number of different directions; you can multi for computer art fans, you can do much more detailed, various and beautiful characters and environ

One look at Eidos' *Tomb Raider* will convince you that third-person is the way to go, as the perspective really highlights its superb 3D environment (it's rather *Quake*-like). Covered briefly last month, one of the aspects of third-person 3D that it takes advantage of is the ability to simulate twisting and firing left and right while moving forward. Electronic Arts' *Fade to Black* allowed you to do this, and so will *Tomb Raider*. It's a great effect – run into a room with bad guys on each side and turn from side to side wasting 'em while running for the door directly in front of you. Try that in *Doom*…


MDK
Here we have this poor sod targeted with our sniper rifle
Into the Shadows
If the gameplay can match these visuals, watch out
Face off against multiple enemies - this is an ambush!
Die by the Sword

Ribbit

With the exception of *Magic Carpet*, Bullfrog has always gone for the third-person view, from their first game *Populous* to their latest holy trinity of cool, *Dungeon Keeper*, *Syndicate Wars* and *Gene Wars*. *Dungeon Keeper* will be an interesting case study in the perspective war; it allows you to take complete control of your dungeon from the third-person, or control a single character in a first-person view, with the computer assuming the dungeon keeping chores. It's all dependent on how well the computer manages your dungeon, but it's safe to say the most fun of the game is watching it from above (though you do miss some of the amazing effects that Bullfrog's 3D engine allows).

Last month's cover game, *Syndicate Wars*, is an even better example of the new wave of 3D overhead games. Being able to rotate the map eliminates most of the weaknesses of the overhead or isometric viewpoint. Look for more types of games to adopt this perspective (maybe *Command & Conquer 2*?).

No regret, no remorse, no mercy

"Non-stop action from a different perspective" was how Origin advertised *Crusader: No Remorse*. We thought it was cool enough to warrant a cover; most gamers subsequently concurred. The detail that an overhead perspective allowed was what set it apart from most games. Sure, it's not true 3D, but who cares? It was a literal (and figurative) blast to play, and early versions of *Crusader: No Regret*, the sequel, promise more of the same.

If one were to speculate on the next-generation of this game, to be titled *Crusader: No Mercy*, it's not hard to imagine that it'll feature a true, rotatable 3D engine and polygonal characters. This could possi-

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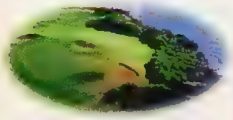

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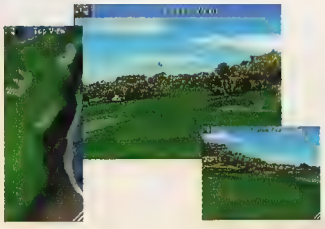

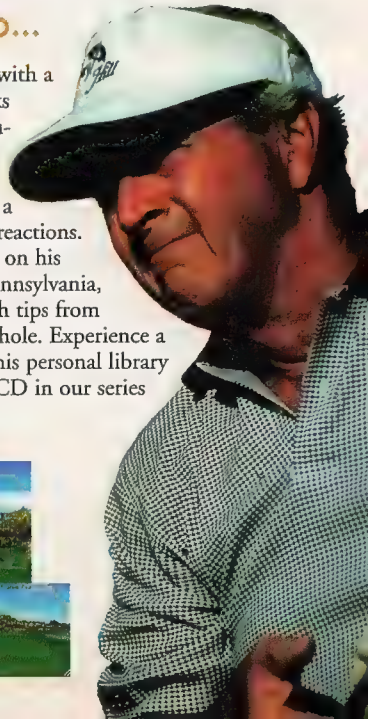

and defense situations, you can sustain a more complex overview of the entire tactical situation, play with better understanding of what your team-mates and opponents are doing, and best of all ments, with a substantially smaller performance hit than you'd have trying to do it all in first person.

bly allow even more animations, more explosions and more detail. Since *Ultima IX: Ascension* (see page 22) is utilizing such an engine, and *Crusader* used a highly modified version of the *Ultima VIII* engine, well… we can hardly wait.

The killer

The most interesting game in this group is the one that, not surprisingly, is the most ground-breaking in design. Shiny Entertainment, known for bringing worms to life with *Earthworm Jim*, are working on *MDK*, perhaps the single most impressive action game in development. People who know Shiny's previous work will see all of their hallmarks in this game. They've taken a tried and true genre (in this case, third- and first-person action games) and twisted it into something altogether more interesting.

This game mixes many genres seamlessly, no mean feat. You're a high-tech sniper, and are given targets within enormous city levels. You can go in with your guns-a-blazin,' killing everything in sight, but that will just piss off the locals. Instead, use stealth to locate your targets, dodging the guards.

Running through town is done via a slick, high-resolution third-person view of the action. You can attack and defend, jump, fly and do all sorts of other cool things. When you spot your target (which could be a mere speck on the horizon) you put your gun on your head, and the game suddenly shifts to a first person sniper view. You can then zoom in on your target, and the detail is astonishing. You can literally target parts of their body and watch them take damage. One robot started crying after noticing he was targeted. Take out a leg and watch the robots topple, swiping at you as they fall. Every enemy has its own unique AI.

Visually, the game's high-resolution graphics and graphic design looks like *Edward Scissorhands 3D*. Fans of Tim Burton's film will understand. Like all of Shiny's games, there's a twisted undercurrent of black humor, with weapons such as the "World's Most Interesting Bomb." Throw it in a room and everyone walks up to and says, "That's an interesting looking device," and boom, they're dead.

The bold pronouncement

It may be the future of the adventure game, with *Ecstatica 2* (page 52) and *Dark Earth* (page 44) being just a couple of examples of this next wave. CRPGs like *Deathtrap Dungeon* will adopt this view for combat. Strategy games like *Gene Wars* benefit by allowing the player to view any and all objects from every conceivable angle quickly. Who knows what the next generation sims and wargames will have to offer? Think of the possibilities…

So here's the point where you're supposed to hear that all games in the future will be like these games. Well, it ain't gonna happen. Why? Just look at *Quake*, reviewed on page 84. It rocks. Big time. And it's here today. And it's regular, old fashioned first-person 3D. It's also further proof that the technology of the game is an important part of the game experience – perhaps a large part, but nonetheless just a part. Too much emphasis is placed on it, and when the day is done, gameplay always wins out. These games all exhibit cutting edge technology, but the ones that we'll likely be talking about years from now are not the ones whose technical prowess wowed us. No, it'll be the ones that we want to play, religiously – the ones that change our perspective of what games should be.

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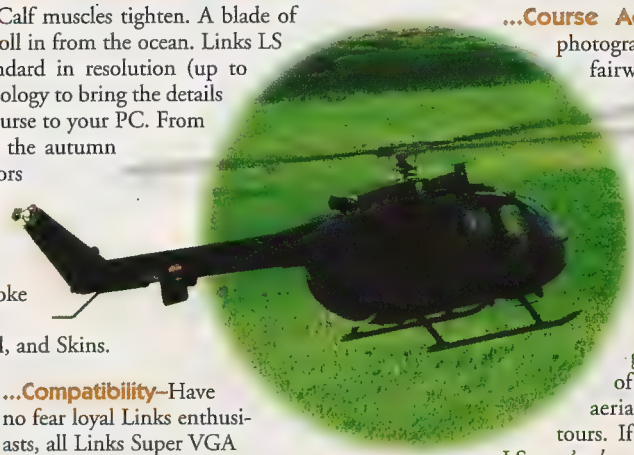

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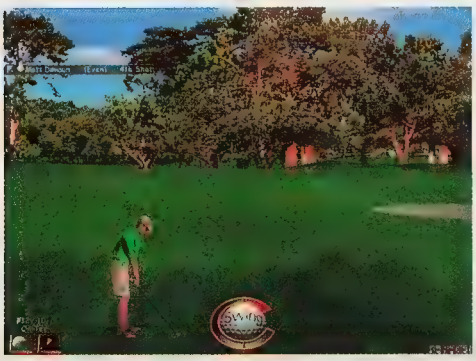

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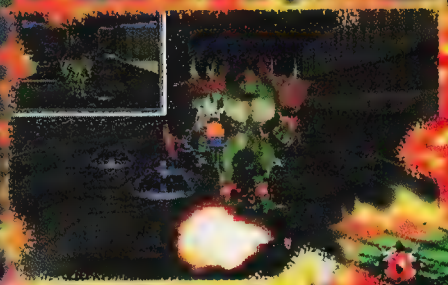

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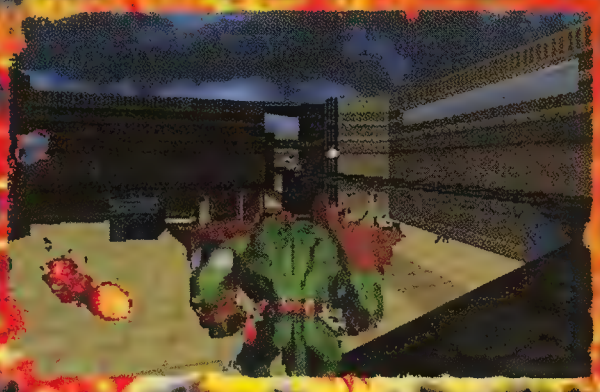

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AMS002

Leading edge hardware m

NovaLogic takes on Boeing-Sikorsky's

What if a software company took all the complaints and criticisms of its previous work seriously, and made a solid effort to address them all? What if it combined that effort with introduction of the most detailed, speediest 3D terrain engine yet in the genre of air combat simulation? What if we told you there's a company doing both simultaneously? You'd gasp.

Well, gasp away; Novalogic – as part of their effort to move entirely into the serious air combat simulation market – has revised their original *Comanche* for *Comanche 3*, to the point where you'll barely be able to see the similarities between the two games.

While what we got to see is still early in development, it's clear that the RAH-66 modeling for this latest installment goes well beyond anything the company's done before in the area of serious flight dynamics computation. For instance, the inertial realities governing a helicopter's flight are now being taken fully into account, so that, for instance, if you're flying in a particular direction and then quickly change the angle of the main rotor, the helicopter will respond appropriately, taking a few moments to lose its forward inertia. Not present in the demonstration given us but planned for final release, full, realistic auto-rotation performance will be included as well (a basic test for any helicopter flight model, somewhat equivalent to the dead-stick performance for fixed-wing aircraft).

Glorious graphics performance

Animation performance begins to rival other chopper sims out there, in terms of full-scale detail. On the system we previewed the alpha software from (P166 Pentium, 32MB EDO RAM, no 3D acceleration co-processing), everything ran fluid-smooth. While few ground combat objects were present in the test, missile, smoke trails and smoke from missile explosions/impact *were* available; firing off multiple rounds of missiles/rockets caused no discernible slowdown in animation speed. The helicopter itself is fully light-sourced, shaded and rendered and – once again – pushes the envelope of this kind of visual, 3D real-time animation to the next level beyond what anyone else has done so far. The sophisticated external camera systems should give players plenty of opportunity to enjoy this side of the design.

All of the above is combined, of course, with Novalogic's next level of Voxel-based technology, Voxel2; featured in *Armored Fist 2* and *F22 Lightning II* as well as *Comanche 3*, this technology not only continues the tradition of providing fully-detailed, true 3D modeling (going beyond the vertical/horizontal planar approach typical for all polygon-based 3D terrain engines), but improves the visual and geographical detail and realism to the point where you'll now be getting – on a P100 or faster Pentium – the kind of nearly photo-realistic terrain detail the real-world US military paid multi-millions for a few scant years back (to run on much more expensive computing hardware). Better yet, the "flight around the grapefruit" limitation of both the original *Comanche* and Looking Glass Technologies' *Flight Unlimited* has been dissolved for the new system; in each separate mission (as well as in the campaigns probably planned for the design – Novalogic was not definite on these aspects of the game as they're still very much in process as of this writing), you'll have enough air and ground space to fly through to feel like you're in a real combat environment. No more flight ceiling, either; while most combat and reconnaissance chopper pilots wouldn't be caught dead (or, rather, they *would* be caught… dead) at anything above 200ft. altitude, if you want to climb high to look for AWACS planes, that'll be your business this time around. What this really indicates from a technology point of view is that the terrain model has developed far enough not to require artificial restrictions on height scaling; the terrain now remains plausible for distance both close in and up at thousands of feet, no small accomplishment.

One of the reasons Novalogic has been focusing on the Comanche for their game designs is the helicopter's automation; while even the advanced AH-64 automates many helicopter control functions, the Comanche – with its next-generation engine technology (see sidebar) – makes flying one of the most complex

The helicopter itself is fully light-sourced, shaded and rendered and – once again – pushes the envelope of this kind of visual, 3D real-time animation to the next level beyond what anyone else has done so far.

▼ Good image of the FANTAIL system on the Comanche

eets leading edge software

RAH-66 in their upcoming Comanche 3

by Steve Wartofsky

beasts out there relatively straightforward. Of course, in real life it would take about 20 hours *just* to learn how to hover well, even in a Comanche, so some compromises are inevitably going to be made for gameplay (few players would really want the *full* training program, believe me). Not many, though; unlike the original game, the weapons systems, instrument systems, flight performance, and the damage taken and given will all attempt to replicate reality this time around.

Chopper design on a mission

A military reality for the US Army is that – according to our source – some people feel the Apache AH-64 is "overtasked" right now. It does reconnaissance, bombing, rescue, mapping, air-air, sometimes all during one mission (!). The systems are sophisticated enough to overwhelm the pilot with information. The helicopter may be able to do it all; the pilot might not. Recent AH-64 simulations on the PC reflect this fact. With the debut of the Comanche, it's hoped that both aircraft will be able to specialize their mission profiles more. The latter helicopter is certainly more specialized, and thus less "systems heavy" than the AH-64. It's thus easier to model, easier to manage for sim fans, and thus more focused in result.

This ultimately means that for PC pilots, *Comanche 3* should be fun to play, too. It'll certainly move into competition with other serious helicopter simulations out there; but the advantage remains for Novalogic that they're modeling a helicopter that – quite literally – is easier to get into and handle. Hard-core fans should realize this, and take *Comanche 3* as an opportunity to see what kinds of improvements are planned for the 21st century in helicopter technology. ■

Comanche RAH-66 (A & B models planned):

Length - 42 feet, 10.20 inches
Width - (fuselage) 9 feet, 3 inches
Rotor - 39 feet, 0.48 inches
Engine - Allison & Garrett LHTEC T800-LHT-801
Triply redundant Fly-By-Wire system
Bearing-less main rotor
FANTAIL anti-torque system (replaces tail rotor)
First Flight: January 4th, 1996, West Palm Beach, FL
Test Pilots: Bob Stiles (Sikorsky) and Bob Gradle (Boeing)
Design & Test Program: Philadelphia, PA
Missions: Armed reconnaissance, light attack and air combat
Initial Production: November 2004
RAH-66B to feature smaller version of Longbow radar used on AH-64

The RAH-66 is planned as an aircraft to supplement the US Army's AH-64 programme; while the latter helicopter maintains its more heavy-duty air-ground combat mission, the RAH-66 will serve to provide rapid, early-warning reconnaissance as well as light support attack capability for both air and ground units. The RAH-66 should also be able to serve as a fully competitive air-air combat system as well. The T800-LHT-801 engine is Allison & Garrett's next generation of technology, and offers performance which is not only significantly more reliable than past achievements, but also simple maintenance, requiring little more than six basic hand tools. Field servicing should thus be reliable, low cost and speedy. The T800 is also heavily automated, offering automatic start and control, transmission and rotor elements. Finally, the T800 should give the RAH-66 much longer range than has previously been achieved for helicopters with this mission profile. ■

◀ Missiles away! Weapons systems are fully retracted except during firing

▼ Night time may be the right time for many of the Comanche's actual missions

▶ Still in development here, the in-cockpit systems will be given the full treatment in C3

▼ Yes, this is what the actual game looks like. Scary

You've always been a tad

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KIDS TO ADULTS
ESRB

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An Adventurer's Heaven

ad•ven•ture (ad-ven' chər) *n.* **1.** A hazardous undertaking. **2.** An unusual or suspenseful experience. **3.** Participation in hazardous or exciting experiences. **4.** A financial speculation or business venture.

That is what *Webster's II* has to say about the word adventure. As gamers, let's add: **5.** Modern health risk lowering the defenses of the immune system by keeping one awake all night. **6.** One of the main causes of divorce, with grounds including "emotional abuse through neglect." **7.** The primary incentive for processor and memory upgrades. **8.** Activity wherein seemingly rational human beings become fanatics, falling all over one another to be the first to upload an illiterate walkthrough. **9.** The main siphon of your college fund. and **10.** Application program that was started in DOS five years ago and is now expected to run under Windows 95. Happily.

The burning question: Why is it sometimes more fun to negotiate the maze so that we may deliver evidence to Klunko-puss while evading the Evil Lord of All Things than to interact with our friends and families? That's an easy one, right? It's an escape, of course. You knew that. Adventure gaming is our own electronic bottle of Johnny Walker Black, and there's plenty of it out there — aging to perfection...hell, some of the stuff is beyond aging and ready for the Game With the Longest Development Time Hall of Fame.

So here are highlights of some of the titles we haven't treated before, and a list of the too numerous for verbosity but still reputable things we can expect to see through the holiday season and well into 1997. Now put down that bottle...er, mouse for awhile and go spend time with your family. They're the ones in the other room with the sad, neglected expressions. Then, when they're asleep, you can sneak back to Klunko-puss and continue endangering your immune system.

Sometimes it rea
to lose

Toonstruck

...ice Space Adventurer's Slice of Heaven

...lly is something to sleep over

Toonstruck

An attempt to sanction butt-bowling

by Cindy Yans

Contributing writers:
Steve Bauman & Scott Udell

Just about everything is off Virgin Interactive's adventure game plate at this time, everything, that is, except what is anticipated to be one of the hottest adventure titles of the upcoming holiday season: *Toonstruck*. In development for over two and a half years, the game is pushing its very talented development team to the limit. And the art and music we see and hear so far is extraordinary.

In a point & click adventure shipping on 3 CDs, you play the part of Drew Blank (acted and voiced by Christopher Lloyd), an animator for Sam Schultz Studios on the Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun Show. In speaking with vice president of product development, Neil Young, it was revealed that Fluffy Fluffy Bun Bun is *not* a male, as I had suspected. He is, in fact, a she (which a truly discerning person may have gleaned from her name...except that it is, after all, the nineties). You, as Drew, are creatively blocked as never before. One fine day Sam Schultz (played by Ben Stein of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and alleged speech writer for Nixon) calls you into his office. You are extremely depressed, but luckily it seems that a New Assignment is pending! Yes! It's....*Fluffy & Friends*. Completely taken aback by this idea, you go back to your office and suffer a nervous breakdown and proceed to have a bit of a psychotic episode in which you are drawn (no pun intended) into a world of your own imagination.

It's a Toon world (*Roger Rabbit*-esque) in which you meet Flux (voiced by Dan Castellaneta), an animated sidekick who is consequently a character upon whom you most want to build a cartoon series. You learn that the Toonstruck world is currently in great danger, and that Cutopia, the kingdom run by the kind and benevolent King Hugh (voiced by David Ogden Stiers), needs your help. It seems that the cute and cuddly world...sickeningly so...of Cutopia is being malevolated by Count Nefarious, the leader of the Malevolands, who has built a Malevolator, which malevolates the unmalevolated. King Hugh wishes to recruit you to build a Cutifier, which will reverse the effects of the Malevelator and hence de-malevelate the malevolations and return balance to the world. Unfortunately, you find that the King Hugh to whom you've been talking is not the real King Hugh at all, and that the real king has been kidnapped. In the interest of maintaining plot thickness, the identity of the false King Hugh will not be revealed in this venue. Let it suffice to say that malevolent cutification ensues, and...well, you'll just have to play it to figure out the rest.

Many fanciful characters live in the *Toonstruck* world, such as The Footman, who is actually a big foot, and not (as Flux mistakes it for) a Butler, which would obviously be...a big but(t). Also present are Spike the Clown, who likes to torture balloon animal sculptures, Fingers the octopus (Dom DeLuise) , and Warp and Woof, who run an abuse tool specialty store.

Cute, purple and wisecracking, Flux is your constant companion and the center of the very subtle hint system. Keeping an eye on him will often indicate which actions will be helpful. The hint system, interestingly enough, is a dynamic one which keeps track of the actions of the player, and will provide more or less help, depending upon one's progress. The measure of progress seems to be a product of what occurs during conversation mode (although it's hard to see how), but conversation is constant, and humorous dialogue abounds.

You will recognize a good deal of the musical score, as the developers have a relationship with a prominent music library, allowing them access to the over 9000 pieces of music in their catalog. It gives them the right to rearrange same and re-record them, or edit them in any way desired to fit the product.

The game features dozens of bizarre game scenarios and puzzles in a setting of classic cartoonomania (beware the dreaded anvil), including fish flushing and butt-bowling, with over 60,000 frames of animation and an anticipated 15-20 hours of gameplay for an above-average adventurer.

So what have we been waiting for? They tell us that the two highest contributors to the length of development have been perfecting the balance of the gameplay, and, given the desired level of graphical representation, – resources, of course. The quality of animation is higher than television animation (strutting in at about 15 frames per second) and is being worked on by people at Nirvana and Rainbow, houses who do work for shows such as *Beetlejuice, Animaniacs,* and *The Tick*.

A big response to this release is anticipated by developers, who believe that the rather dry adventure season for LucasArts could prove a boon. So just when it seems more likely for us to be struck by lightening than by *Toon,* up the umbrella! Any minute now. (Virgin)

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A piece of the rock

Obsidian

Don't dare to call it yet *another Myst* clone. They'll slap you silly. Unless of course you are already silly; then they'll slap you upside da haid.

Obsidian is what they're calling a graphic hallucination and *more* than just an adventure (of *course* they are). Says Matthew Fassberg, producer of *Obsidian*, "*Obsidian* isn't just a game, it's a journey…a trip that will ask players to surrender conventional logic as they seek to understand new laws of physical and psychological reality."

You're Lila, and you and your partner Max are scientists who have just completed a huge project: the Ceres project. The two of you have just developed a super nanotechnological computer which

Obsidian

monitors the Earth's atmosphere. Sent into space like a satellite, it not only monitors the impurities in the Earth's atmosphere, but then attempts to correct them with the goal of re-balancing Earth's ecology in order to stabilize it. It's another triumph of man over nature which we *used* to "let take its course." After this project, you and Max are very tired and have decided to take a well-deserved camping trip in the rain forest. Oh sure, no Caribbean resort hotel for you guys, noooooo. The rain forest. Right. Absolutely (giant mosquitoes). Walking merrily through the forest one morning, you notice a disturbance in the clearing, some evidence of a struggle, and find Max's hat there. It looks so withered and alone without the usual Max-head underneath. So you panic and are running through the forest calling out for Max. "Maaaaax! Maaaaaaax!" you shout, admiring your inspired choice of words. And suddenly right before you, there it is: a huge rock formation…the Obsidian. You get closer and closer and it looms taller and taller and you begin to sense that Max is somehow associated with this rock structure. Could it be the shape? No…something is definitely wrong. But you've come this far. You must go in.

If you've sensed that all that's happened so far amounts to a hill of melodramatic exposition, you would be right. Enter the realms of the Obsidian where the *real* game begins.

Obsidian is, for the most part, a puzzle game, but Rocket Science believes that the story is rich enough to hold up underneath the puzzles (unlike Max's hat, which sagged the minute his head evacuated…). The story, in fact, is said to unfold *through* the puzzles rather than in spite of them, which, if successful, is always a treat. After entering the Obsidian, you find yourself on an eerie, first-person adventure into an organically technological dream world accompanied by an original soundtrack from the renowned Thomas Dolby. Four realms await as you attempt to find Max and unravel the mystery of the Obsidian.

Throughout the game you will be in contact with bit-bots, which at first appear to be buckets o' lips, who will assist you in clearly defining your goals along the way. Initially you contact Rebel Control, a paranoid sort who mercilessly grills you:

"Did anyone follow you here?"

Er… (you choose "no").

"What about your socks? Did you check them for rocks?"

Er…uh, I know it's something I should have done, but well…today was well…(you choose "no").

"Why NOT? ARE YOU ONE OF THEM!?"

Uh oh, am I one of *what*? My socks, perhaps? This is just a taste of the bizarre experience yet to come. Forget the laws of physics as you know them. Each game realm has its own reality, and part of the game experience is to discover and work along with the new physical or social "laws." At times, choosing death over life may be the only way to live. One realm pits you against a hexahedron environment, each plane of which must be traversed; orientation becomes a great physical challenge ("Dare. Double Dare. Physical Challenge."). Another draws you into the viscera of the Abraxas, a spider-like creature whose every leg contains a perplexity to be solved.

Cryptocodes abound, and puzzles come in many varieties, and often their solutions are rewarded with a stunning video sequence. Gameplay is not completely linear, and every puzzle in every realm needn't be solved to finish the game. Rocket Science has done scads of consumer testing with relation to the game's difficulty level, and when all is said and done, they expect 40 to 50 hours of gameplay. Now *that's* a lot of hours at small change per hour; I often wonder who these focus groups are…

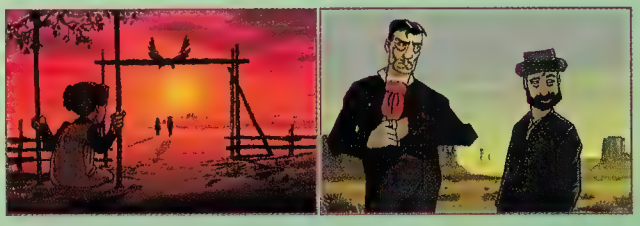
Rocket Science is calling this product "the next level of graphic adventures" aimed at hard-core adventure enthusiasts. With the skin-deep beauty oozing from every pore, it's difficult not to get excited about the game's potential substance. For sample puzzles, which are not from the game, but are *Obsidian*-related and designed by Scott Kim, creator of the game, check out the Rocket Science web site at www.rocketsci.com. It offers weekly puzzles and drawings for fabulous prizes. And if you run into Max's hat, hang onto it…it could be a collector's item. (Rocket Science)

How the West was pulled forth once again

Outlaws

he camera pans a vast, rocky desert, with a glaring sun, which serves as a backdrop for the main character: a dark, solitary man with a scowl on his leathery face. He spits a stream of tobacco as he crouches behind a striated red rock butte and takes careful aim with his rifle at four outlaws on thundering horses. Spanish guitars strum and a chorus of voices swells…" — Barbara Gleason

I am always surprised when the Spaghetti Western is reborn time and time again in the entertainment realm, be it in film, television or multimedia gaming. I slapped my forehead at *Freddy Pharkas* (and my knee several times as well), posed perplexed eyebrows at *Dust* (one of them rising and falling as I spoke, in tribute to Cyberflix's engine), and just when I thought we'd never see an ol' cowhand ridin'



Outlaws

off thar into the sunset again, we're confronted, er, *presented* with *Outlaws* from the source that many still claim to be the true Masters of the Game: LucasArts.

With so many adventure hits under its belt, LucasArts hopes to broaden its buckle and carve out a notch for the Old West. *Outlaws*, in fact, is the only release in the adventure category this season (except for the highly entertaining *Mortimer and the Riddle of the Medallion*…far from the fare of the tobacco spittin' cowpoke). The game is designed to transcend the traditional first person shooter and combine action-adventure with network play; it is one of the first LucasArts games to feature multiplayer support. Up to 16 players may choose their own outlaws, each with unique fighting characteristics.

In the Adventure component of the game, you are not Everyoutlaw, but instead are ex-marshal James Anderson (not to be confused with the insurance salesman patriarch of Princess, Bud and Kitten), once the most rootin' tootin' wildest shootin' hombre in the West. Desperadoes (who come in many flavors) have shattered your sheltered life, and you set forth — a lone man with a gun — on a quest which leads you to the deadliest killers this side of the Mississippi.

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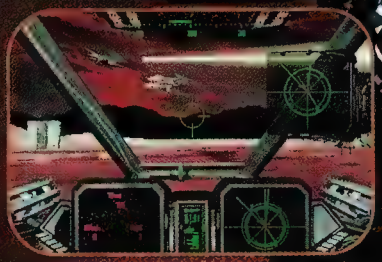

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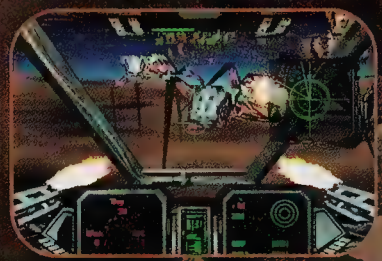

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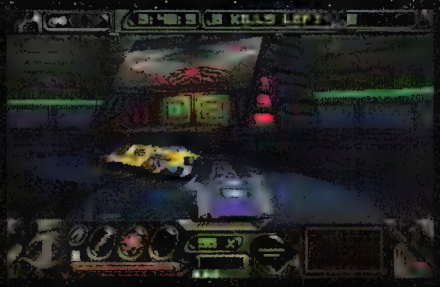

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It seems that project leader Daron Stinnnett and lead programmer Stephen Shaw were inspired after watching *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* one night…ayep. A link to Greek mythology occurred to Shaw. Tie the Old West to classic Greek mythology in which exist the elements of revenge, a quest and the personification of evil…in fact tie *any* setting to these elements, and what do you get? "A cliché," you say? Wrong. You get a classic plot shell which must then be imbued with the essence of now (or then). In this case, the hero's journey takes him into the abyss, where he faces temptation and corruption but finds redemption in the end… still a shell, but you get the drift.

The graphics are hand drawn and vivid, and are the inspiration of Charlie Ramos, *Outlaw*'s lead animator. "I was motivated by the dark, expressionist art of Egon Schiele, an Austrian artist who lived in the early part of this century," said Ramos. "The characters are extremely stylized, but based in reality." Charlie also studied the film *Once Upon a Time in the West* and other Sergio Leone Westerns.

The personality of each character is distinctly recognizable from the detailed rendering: "Gentleman" Bob Graham, chief baddie, is a fancy dressed, squinty-eyed cool character. Matt "Dr. Death" Jackson is dressed like a dentist, with a ruthless, cold-blooded glare reminiscent of Laurence ("Is it safe?") Olivier in *Marathon Man*. "Slim" Sam Fulton has a tall, boyish look with a half-wit smile. "Bloody" Mary Nash is a cigar-chomping floozy. Whew! Nothing formula about that, eh?

Lead background artist Adam Schnitzer uses the muted, earth shades of old Western films to create the game's landscapes and weathered building interiors and exteriors. The art style of Frederick Remington and old Photographs from the library at Skywalker Ranch contribute to the overall look and feel of Adams' backgrounds.

Outlaws uses both the *Dark Forces* 3D and *Rebel Assault II*'s INSANE engines, enabling it to deliver the action and story components of classic 60's Westerns in an interactive format. So if the phrase, "Howdy, pardner" makes you just awash with nostalgia, cock your gun, your hat, your shuttle(?) and take twenty paces…now turn and stand face to face with LucasArts' reputation — who do *you* think will win? (LucasArts)

Seeking the light in post-Apocalyptic future

In the old days of computer gaming (you know – 1995), the term "action/adventure" used to be a marketing ploy by PR types to get adventure gamers to play a shoot 'em up. With the blurring of genre lines, however, gamers have to beware of ignoring such terminology; while a game may have the action components of a shooter, it may also feature some actual adventuring. Such may certainly be the case with Mindscape's upcoming *Dark Earth*.

The story behind *Dark Earth* isn't terribly original, but it has been fully fleshed out. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, a close brush with a huge comet rains meteorites down onto the surface of Earth, generating a pall over the entire planet and, incidentally, destroying civilization. Fast forward your imagination an indeterminate distance into the future and discover a world still shrouded in darkness, shivering. Poison clouds, "things" in the night, and all other sorts of post-Apocalyptic stuff abound, with reformed remnants of civilization clinging to a few

Dark Earth

"Stallites," fortified cities built up in areas where shafts of light pierce the clouds. Why that cloud is still there and how clear zones stay fixed in one place isn't explained, but that's okay; since science is out and Sun God worship is in, we won't worry about it too much. While the stories of the cataclysm remain, the scientific causes aren't; most folks think the event "a divine punishment," but, as the Mindscape literature says, "the truth may be different…"

As the main character, you'll get to explore one of the Stallite cities, wandering through 50+ beautifully detailed locations (viewed from over 400 camera angles). You'll meet some 80 characters (with 3,500 animations altogether), fighting many of them in a manner reminiscent of both the 3D fighting games and another developed-in-France series, *Alone in the Dark*. But exploration is a key here; instead of fighting your way through a linear set of battles, you'll get to choose your path through the game's non-linear storyline. And don't worry! If you're not terribly skilled at the action end, the game will let you choose from "multiple difficulty settings."

On the gee whiz side, the preview sequences Mindscape showed at E3 in May looked beautiful, with smooth character animations set in extremely detailed rendered backgrounds (heah, what can we say; it's French!). Gameplay will be in 256 color SVGA, and cut scenes will incorporate 32,000 colors. The game will make heavy use of light sourcing and texture management, and Mindscape is promising "realistic shadow management."

Even if action/adventure isn't your glass of iced tea, you'll get other chances to experience the *Dark Earth* universe, as Mindscape is considering other games (including a strategy game) to follow some time after this first game release sometime in the first half of 1997. (Mindscape)

Family, Genus...Species?

ow many years has it been since *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* had early text adventurers puzzling and snickering? Wait. Don't answer that. I can hear our collective puzzlelogical clocks ticking madly. Steve Meretzky probably also doesn't want to admit how long ago that was...but no fear. He's launching yet another space age vehicle for the PCs and Macs in our living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms, offices, kitchens, studies, libraries, basements and bathrooms (laptops only). Welcome, players, to Armpit VI, perhaps the 6th least desirable place in the galaxy to raise children except maybe <your detestable city choice here>.

You're a dick (a much more acceptable thing to have been in the 1940's, perhaps), and a low-grade company dick at that. Alias is the name, Alias Node. You're on the path of a ruthless and elusive alien criminal, and you're thirsty. *Darn* thirsty. Luckily, your search leads you to that polymorphously perverse watering hole of holes, The Thirsty

Space Bar

Tentacle. Enter, Alias; it is *The Space Bar*.

Here you encounter the charming Zzazzl bartender, a large, segmented centipede with blue metallic-looking skin and two appendages per segment. He carries the unfortunate name of Soldier 714-Z-367, but you may call him 714 for short. He is one of over 40 characters, eight with whom you must establish "empathy/telepathy," a state of mind-mesh which, when successfully applied, will throw you into a flashback of the character's life. These flashback scenarios take you (with all of the alien characteristics of your host) to species-specific environments, where (you guessed it) puzzles are to be solved in order to advance.

The characters and their races are too numerous to list here, but to give you a flavor of the weird and grotesque treats which await: in addition to the somewhat tame Marmali creatures who work at the Tentacle, there is the owner Blobster, who goes by the name of Gorb; he is huge, headless, soft and blubbery, as well as greedy, ruthless, mean and soulless (and probably running for public office); Fleebix the Neblitz and Thud the Salivraster, who are described as a pear shaped creature floating in a jar of water and his symbiotic other whose job it

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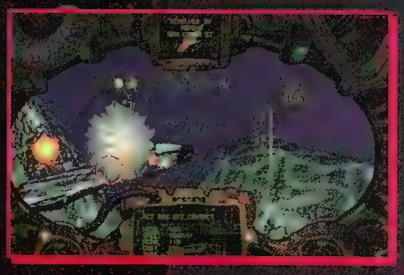

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is to absorb insults and provide for the physical well being of the pair; and another unforgettable duo, the Fruufnids, My and Ty, who at first glance (and after many more glances) look like Polynesian drinks sporting paper umbrellas in Easter Island Statue cups.

Explore Winky Howdy's Cowboy Saloon (founded by the illegitimate offspring of Howdy Doody) and play Bibble Bonk. Gamblers beware...you could lose a bundle betting on the Bibble-bonking ball. Bibbles, it seems live on the tri-level Bibble Board, and their job is to get hit in the head (bonked, if you will) by a heavy ball. The player's job is to place a bet on which Bibble gets bonked and what he will say subsequent to the said bonking. Bibble bets are identified by the position of the Bibble — i.e. "I'll bet fifty crackerquids on Upper Middle Bibble...," and what they'll say is anybody's guess...er bet. Make sense? Bet not. Or bet plenty. We are… on Meretzky, anyway. (Rocket Science)

The canvas back has your name on it

Talk about a hot license! The director of *Jaws, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Raiders of the Lost Ark, E.T., Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* comes to multimedia gaming this fall, in a rather non-traditional adventure putting *you* in the director's chair.

Formerly known as *Steven Spielberg's Movie Maker*, this game challenges the player to create the next Hollywood blockbuster. With Spielberg as your personal guide and mentor, you will be able to shout into your megaphone and watch the peons jump. Actually, you will enlist the aid of your virtual Hollywood crew to master time, budgets, cast, crew and more in an almost-sim type experience, the result of which will be your burgeoning career as a movie mogul. Your screening room is guaranteed to be pretty small, however, with an audience of one – unless your friends are crazy enough to want to come over and see what you've created.

The product not only carries the weight of the Spielberg name, but also showcases the talents of Quentin Tarantino, Jennifer Aniston and Penn and Teller; quite a cast. Possible plot: hot director sends Vincent Vega after Rachel, but the hit is botched when they all appear on an elephant in Madison Square Garden as Mount Rushmore disappears.

The object of the game is to rise from being Spielberg's protégé to join him as a full-fledged "A-List" director. Production budgets will burst through the roof as your crew sits around eating donuts in tents while waiting for the outdoor snowstorm scene shoot to start…and it's August…and the film is due to release in October…and it's Kenya. OK, granted, that is probably *not* one of the scenarios, but all sorts of obstacles exist to keep you on your toes as you plow through the Novice mode, which will provide the basic principles of movie making, to the Intermediate level, which begins to allow access to multiple story lines, and finally to the Advanced stage, which ultimately leads fledgling moguls to the "A-List" where they can call upon the actors to ad lib – often with unpredictable results.

Steven Spielberg's Director's Chair and Lands of Lore II: Guardians of Destiny

While Spielberg was shooting the movie, other cameras were shooting the real behind-the-scene challenges which were taking place. From dealing with delays in stunt preparation (where burning hoop flames burned out of control, as chemical coated terriers looked on in horror) to a star being injured during a fight sequence (when his wife crept onto the set with a baseball bat) – these real life scenarios breathe a bit more life into the simulation and enhance gameplay. Players will actually feel the pressures of film making…as though there isn't enough pressure in their *own* lives.

Completing all levels of the game means the player has successfully moved through the Hollywood shuffle to create his or her feature film, all edited and ready for Cannes. Create marketing and advertising campaigns by designing and printing posters and tickets…(or hire a PR firm), and there you have it! Invite friends to your screening room…or if you're really brave, give it a web page.

Polish up that tainted birthright

When we think of what Westwood Studios must be doing these days, a picture springs to mind of a quiet beach, a macadamia tree, pineapple fights and a small cluster of people working on the next seventeen generations of *Command & Conquer* as the rest look on – sitting on their lounge chairs and wondering how to spend those immense bonus checks. Right.

Instead, like everyone else, they're losing sleep, meeting deadlines, trying desperately to get *Red Alert* out the door and crafting the sequel to the highly acclaimed *Lands of Lore*. Almost three years in the making, *Lands of Lore II: Guardians of Destiny* is yet *another* in the batch of adventure/CRPGs on the burner for imminent release.

Still striving for a realistic environment unseen by human eyes, elven programmers are busily at work with their little hammers and nails crafting New Technology they believe will transcend all that has come before. At any rate, it'll probably transcend its daddy, *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*.

Louis Castle, Vice President of Creative Development says, "Our goal was to create an experience which truly delivers on the promise that fantasy gamers have always longed for…[*timely shipment???*] – a game that will put them into the Lands like never before. *Guardians of Destiny* is *made* of exceptions, which drove the programmers crazy, but which gamers will love. For the fist time you will see creatures and people of the Lands behave more realistically than ever before."

Players will take the role of Luther, the cursed (two syllables) son of the Sorceress of the Dark Army, who is under the possession of the bane of many sons of sorceresses – the lethally vile, accursed (three syllables) birthright. Luther will explore the fully-rendered 3D 360-degree traversable world in search of the…dum-de-DUM-dum…Ancient Magic which will release him. As Luther evolves, he gets smarter, but so of course do his enemies. Advanced AI makes the population think and react intelligently. They will retreat from missile fire, look for cover, withdraw when critically wounded, send for reinforcements and order take-out.

Over 80 spells and special effects will explode from your screen in tremble-producing high resolution as you decide to raise the dead (the Lazarus Spell), summon warrior imps (The Spell of Imp-potence) or just whip up the occasional lightning storm (The Thor-Thpot Thpell). A dynamic lighting system allows torches to flicker, bonfires to blaze and magical devices to pulse with energy.

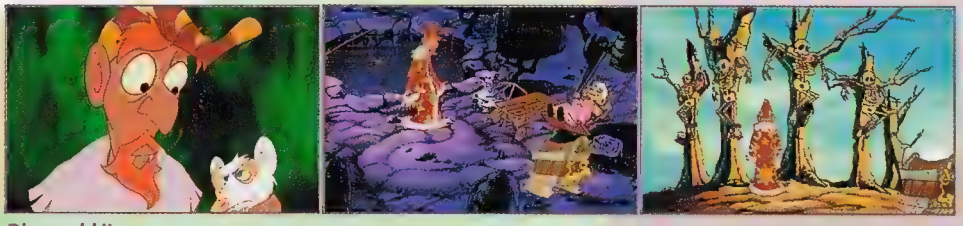
If you've ever aspired to shape-shifting, here's your chance; you will be able to change into different forms as the game progresses. Each metamorphosis will empower you with different abilities and affect interaction with the world. Beast, lizard or plumber; the choice is yours. The sleaze factor is also yours to choose. In a gaming style indigenous to the cyberpolitician, you can still win the game even if you lie, cheat and steal your way through. Hmmm, let's keep this one away from the "boys at the top." (Westwood Studios)

Partying with Death

We may not get all of the jokes, but anglophiles across the US are privy to the humor (or is that humour?) which can be found in the bizarre books of Terry Pratchett. His signature book, *Discworld*, described a world where elephants hold up the continents while the whole mess travels through space on the back of a turtle. The first game based

on his books, Psygnosis' *Discworld*, was by any measure an excellent game, but it lacked a certain polish. *Discworld II: Missing Presumed…!?* is smooth as a baby's butt, baby…

Discworld II starts with a bomb, perhaps not the best image you'd want associated with a product which actually costs money, but a bomb nonetheless. Once again, you control the hapless Rincewind, who happens upon said bomb and decides to diffuse it. Well, Rincewind being Rincewind and all manages to screw up, causing much damage. But he also causes many more problems.



Dicsworld II

It seems the explosion sent Death off to Australia, and he's decided he likes the climate. Unfortunately, people keep dying, and start to wander around when Death doesn't show up. Rincewind must first locate Death, but when he does he finds him a bit depressed and thinking he's of no use to society.

It's up to Rincewind to restore Death's aura. He decides to make an advertisement for him to convince the world how wonderful Death really is. It's an all-singing, all-dancing affair (with lyrics by Eric Idle, the voice of Rincewind, and an arrangement by Tom Scott, who scored the Oscars – sample lyric "You can't take it with you/You can't keep what you've got/So why not/Just lie back/And simply rot"), and it's so successful Death becomes a mega-star, with a talk show, merchandising, groupies and he quits his day job altogether.

Once again, Rincewind is here to take Death's job. Learn reaping, proper scythe techniques, and learn to talk in ALL CAPS (don't ask). But while Rincewind gets more Death-like, Death becomes more human, and all hell breaks loose.

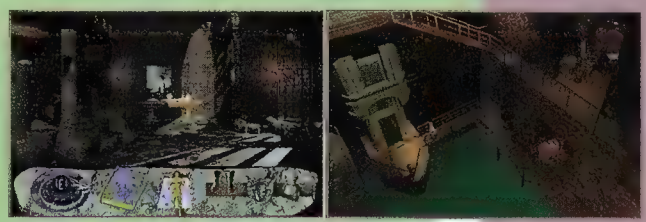
With a plot as wonderfully warped as that, it's almost irrelevant that the game has superb, cel-based animation, high-resolution graphics and an all-digital orchestrated score. But it does. It also has something like 50 hours of gameplay, spread over three CDs. As Sierra and LucasArts' products get shorter, *Discworld* gets longer. And gamers should appreciate that.

With the complete package of story, visuals, puzzles and humor, *Discworld II* is easily one of, if not the, most highly anticipated adventures of the upcoming holiday season. (Psygnosis)

It's not Wizardry 8!

izardry… a role-playing series that's stretched forward from the mists of early computer gaming, a series that's continued to this day. When Sirtech announced that the next *Wizardry* game would be an adventure instead of an RPG, role-players were seen wearing sackcloth and with ashes in their hair, wailing "What are you doing to my RPG!" While it's true that *Nemesis* is an adventure, it's really too early for RPGers to mourn; from the early material Sirtech has provided us, *Nemesis* sounds like it will fit in well with the *Wizardry* mythos, combining both adventure elements and portions of the classic RPG series.

In *Nemesis*, the tampering tricksters of Nithera are gone, having twiddled a bit too much with the unknown. However, they've left behind some troublesome talismans, containers of an uncontrollable power, a power that apparently wants you dead. It's up to you to 1) stay alive, and 2) tame the untameable, and conquer the power of the talismans.



Nemesis and The City of the Lost Children

Sirtech refers to *Nemesis* as a "single charater role-playing adventure." If you don't do RPGs, then don't worry; they tell us those icky details like stats and so forth remain hidden from view. If you're one bemoaning the passage of the RPG, however, such details are "only a click away." Combat is good ol' RPG hack 'n' slash, using a real-time engine that is "true to role-playing principles." Lest you shy away from the phrase "real time," Sirtech is quick to assure us that the combat does not *Nemesis* a *Doom*-clone make.

RPGs and adventures both thrive on creatures and characters, and *Nemesis* features over 40 3D modeled nasties, and the loot these worthies are guarding will be similarly modeled. Another element adapted from RPGs will be the magic system, one that will be simple (no more memorizing a magical periodic table) but effective in combat. Sirtech promises that the puzzle elements (critical for the adventure crowd) will be challenging but not obscure. A simple mouse interface, AutoMap and AutoLogbook features, and atmospheric music and sound effects will complete the package.

While it's too early to tell if they've achieved it, adventurers and RPGers alike should keep a close eye out for their *Nemesis*. (Sirtech)

It's French. It's wierd.

Before you blanch at yet another game based on a movie (OK, so you've never heard of the movie), consider a few things. First, look at the screen shots. That should pique your interest. Second, the movie was created by French film makers Jean-Pierre Junet and Marc Caro, who previously created the art-house hit, *Delicatessen*. Finally, the game is being produced by Psygnosis, who have *Ecstatica* and *Discworld* floating around to show some sort of prowess with adventure games.

The story (of both the film and the game) concerns itself with a scientist named Krank, who lives in a dilapidated house plunked down on pilings in the sea. He is aging prematurely because he cannot dream. Children in the city are disappearing; it turns out that Krank is kidnapping them, bringing them to his laboratory, and is stealing their dreams to make them his own. Krank's latest victim is a little boy named Denree, the brother to a circus strongman, named One. He teams up with a young girl, Miette, to rescue Denree and free all of the lost children.

This dark fairy tale of a movie received glowing reviews, and the game will try to receive the same sort of acclaim by offering a lot of puzzle solving and riddles. 20 characters will be wandering the locations, each modeled in 3D and quite distinctive looking.

Psygnosis are sparing no expense in the atmosphere of the game, hiring Angelo Badalamenti to compose the introductory soundtrack (he's most famous for the soundtrack to *Twin Peaks*). The costumes are being replicated from the ones found in the film, which were created by noted designer Jean Paul Gaultier (he of the spiky Madonna corsets).

The film-maker Caro is overseeing the artistic direction, and it shows. The film (available at your local video store, and worth the rental), and the game, come across as one extended hallucination. It may end up a niche product, but gamers looking for something out of the ordinary may want to look for these children. (Psygnosis)

Shivers 2

Feed into the stalking

Seems like nobody ever leaves Cyclone, Arizona — except that suddenly *everyone's* left it. (*Eyes follow you.*) Cyclone is not the tourist center of the southwest, but conveniently, your friend's aunt lives there, and it could be the perfect place for his band to film a rock video. Or not. *Anywhere* could be the perfect place to film a rock video, but Cyclone has something special to offer: There's Fear in this dusty burgh... pungent enough to smell. (*Eyes follow you.*) "*Who's there?*".....It's enough to give you the *Shivers*.

Not resting for a minute on the laurels of *Shivers*, the *Shivers 2* team (much the same team as the original's) is busy readying a sequel, targeted for release in Spring 1997. A first-person adventure with a brand new high-res 360-degree-panorama engine (about which the team is a-shiver), places you in the small town of Cyclone, AZ, where your friends in the band and pretty much everyone else have disappeared. What happened is up to you to investigate.

The game operates much like its predecessor — it's primarily a puzzle game — with more inventory type puzzles than before. *Shivers* fans will be happy to hear that now more than one item at a time can be carried, and that a map allowing instant destination selection is available — no more traversing the *entire* game-space time and time again.

Art Director Ron Speirs' preliminary graphic work is already stunning, with locations which are twisted and definitely "out there," much like the missing characters who used to inhabit them. The local motel decor, for instance, is a cross between an art deco salon and Hell. And composer Guy Whitmore promises that the Rock & Roll score will enhance and weave *through* the story, rather than blare idly beside it. The rock style varies, with "something for everyone." (Amazingly, they allowed us to quote them on that).

We can kiss the Ixupi goodbye, this time...something *else* is lurking in the wings. (Sierra)

Shivers II and **Realms of the Haunting**

Thrill to the Amazon Huntresses

relative new kid on the block, AnyRiver Entertainment plunges into the interactive entertainment market nakedly and boldly. Developed by Advance Reality as a native Windows 95 product, *A Fork in the Tale* is being billed as "a fast-paced adventure game [which] uses cutting edge video technology to immerse you in a story that's part Indiana Jones, part improv comedy."

The game places you in the role of an accidental hero in an adventure where the fate of two worlds hangs in the balance. You are merely a hapless soul without a care in the world who is walking down the street one day, and suddenly find yourself in the middle of a mob hit. The next thing you know, you are running along the beach on some island to which you were mysteriously transported. Nice waves. But who are the wild-eyed guys on horses behind you? Do you run, or do you interact? This is the island of

A Fork in the Tale and **Incredible Idiots in Space**

Eseveron (who knew?), and the decision with which you are faced is the first of many branches, er, *forks* in the story, er, *tale* – hence the name, er, *title*.

Eseveron is a mythical parallel world separated by cosmic time (and good taste), where you will encounter a forgotten princess, angry huntresses (scantily clad, of course), magical wizards, and, supposedly, some really bad guys in cheap polyester suits. Developers promise that they are still working very hard on the humorous aspects of the game, hoping to achieve balance. Good comedy is *very* hard to do, and even harder to do for the mass market. *Fork's* accidental hero's voice is currently being provided by California Bay Area improv comedian Cary Odes, but as of this writing, no final decision has been made for voice-over. It's a shame that a team can't just write five separate scripts for the four general styles of humor known to English-speaking mankind: Dry British, Dry Non-British, Other and of course, None. (AnyRiver Entertainment)

Not your average haunted house game

The success of a 3D adventure game like *Under a Killing Moon* was not lost on UK developer Gremlin, who adopted a 3D first-person interface for their comedic adventure, *Normality*. That same engine takes a turn for the serious in *Realms of the Haunting*, a game which could accurately be described as *Alone in the Dark* meets *Doom*, with much less emphasis on combat than either of those games.

The player journeys to a town in England, Hellston (an actual town), after the death of the protagonist's father. A series of untimely events pull the player into a number of different realms, including Sheol (Hell), Hellud (Earth), Raquia (Spirit) and Arqua (Divine). Each realm is distinctive looking and well rendered, offering hundreds of individual locations filled with characters and objects. You will discover a number of things in these alternate worlds, all of which will end up leading to one of those apparently requisite "save the world" scenarios.

Full-motion video ties the story together, and it looks to be well done (even the rendered backgrounds are pretty well integrated). The 3D engine has been upgraded to SVGA resolutions, and a native Windows 95 version is also in development (it will ship with both DOS and Windows versions on the same CD). It's currently looking like it'll require a few CDs to contain all of the environments and cut scenes.

The 3D engine does an excellent job of creating that "what's around the corner" feeling so few adventure games are able to generate. Combat is promised not to be excessive (it is real-time), but running away will be the right option in some cases, which could only add to the tension (imagine running away, closing doors behind you so that the monsters have a harder time catching up).

Good horror games are always welcome, and *Realms of the Haunting* has the potential to be just that. (Interplay)

Chief Chunkwiff Chortles Churishly

"What is it?"
"What is what?"
"That...that *thing*."
"What *thing*?"
"That thing that's trying to take over the universe."
"Ohhhhh. *That* thing."
"So...what *is* it?"
"What is *what*?"
"IDIOT."
"Exactly!"
"You agree you're an idiot?"
"No... in the universe...it's Idiots!"

t's *Incredible Idiots in Space*, winner of the Highbrow-Title-of-the-Season award, which features 36 different alien life forms to assist, hurt and insult you. The universe is at your fingertips as you attempt to uncover just who is attempting to gain control.

One or two players can play at the same time, working with and in spite of each other; each level of gameplay is a mini-adventure game within the game. Confronted with yards of humorously-intended dia-

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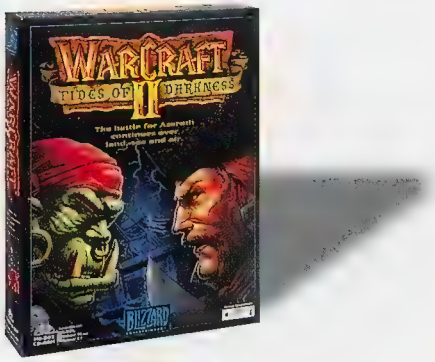
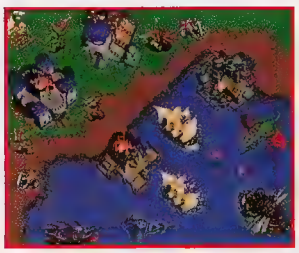
Game of the Year.



#1 Selling PC Game, Jan-April 1996 PC Data Report • **Game of the Year,** PC Gamer • **Multiplayer Game of the Year,** PC Gamer • **Golden Triad Award,** Computer Game Review • **Game of the Year,** Computer Gaming World Readers' Choice • **Best On-line Game,** C/NET



8 Players Head to Head

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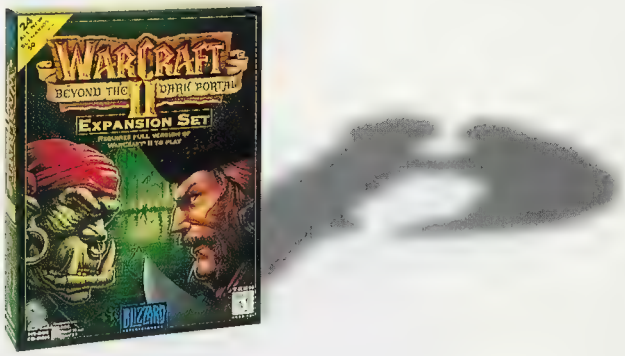
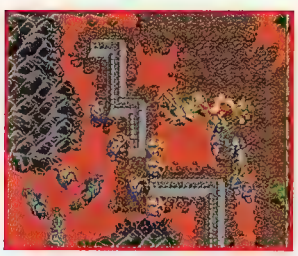
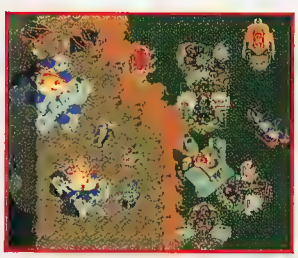


The Expansion Set.



2 New Story Lines!

24 New Scenarios!



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logue, it's up to the player to choose correct responses in order to proceed. Hundreds of sight gags and amusing lines accompany the idiots as they stumble through space in outrageous vehicles.

Mook and D'Bu are police partners who have that symbiotic patrol car relationship that has worked for comic teams for decades. Chief Chunkwiff, Mook and D'Bu's commanding officer is, in a word, STRESS. You'll also meet Sadie Fakaata, an elderly tough-as-nails "abductee from Boca Raton, Florida," Zash Gilnok, the standard melodramatic, back-stabbing photogenic, big toothed, "I Prob'ly Think This Song is About Me" pretty boy, totally useless supercop sycophant (to one day anchor the evening news, no doubt), Pizwit Frimjot, genuinely evil, driven with one obsessive goal — to control the universe (hmmm, could *he* be a suspect in the master quest?), and Flatuella, billed simply as the sexiest lump of mud in the cosmos.

See morons with weapons! See lots of ugly aliens! See an old Jewish lady! See the creature that is a log of Spam by day and a log of Spam by night! See exclamation points being overused! See *Incredible Idiots in Space*...then see if you're still chuckling. (ASC)

Golden Gate

Right back where I started from...where bowers of flowers ...bloom in the spring

he story begins 200 years ago, where the throne of an Old World kingdom is usurped by the King's evil brother. The rightful King nabs the kingdom's treasure, takes it on the lam, joins the Peace Corps (becomes a missionary, actually), and spreads tranquillity and good will all throughout New World until he finds himself at the Mission de San Francisco de Asis.

His daughter Alexandra is killed just prior to reaching him after she had been following his trail and only recently learned of her birthright. This is the first of decade after decade of tragedies, all with links to the lost treasure of the Old World King. The Gold Rush, the San Francisco earthquake, and the fire of 1906 are all woven into the legend of this lost treasure and an ancient evil that has been unleashed. Finally, in present day San Francisco, the player encounters a grizzly old treasure hunter who has come upon some new and vital information about finding the hoard. With this research to guide him, the player will explore the city and reconstruct the past to recover the lost treasure.

Much research about the history of San Francisco has been done to lay the groundwork for this game, and all of the city landmarks will be featured in the over 2000 hand-painted 16-bit images. Watercolor was chosen to evoke a mood that is consistent with the mysterious and tragic elements of the story and represents an alternate, photo-impressionistic style that is uncommon in the industry.

Koala Lumpur and **Ecstatica 2**

A first person full 360o orientation and over 10 minutes of full motion video (only *ten minutes*? That's a definite plus for those of us who'd much rather do without it) help in bringing to the small screen an essentially storyline game — with only minor emphasis on *Jewels of the Oracle* style puzzles. Tunefully: Califorrrrrrnia heeere I cooooome! (Panasonic)

Koala Lumpur

A mystic marsupial scrolls off your screen

f you dive neck-deep into Brøderbund's game lineup, you will come up panting with only this one adventure title that's *not* for the Rugrat set. Yet at first smell, it's cartoon style seems to exude a kidfully pleasing aroma. Worry not, mature one; developed jointly with Colossal Pictures, *Koala Lumpur: Journey to the Edge* promises to deliver an immersive escape into an off-beat world filled with intriguing puzzles and plenty of irreverent humor.

Our hero is Zen Master Koala Lumpur, a little lavender eucalyptus-eating fellow with mystical robes and a really cool fez. Koala has been charged by Ella Mental, the Supreme Being herself, to help find the Lost Scroll of Cartoon Prophesies. After enlisting the aid of his old pal Dr. Dingo Tu-Far via a karma call, Koala is ready to begin his quest.

You are Koala's familiar, Fly, and guide him and Dingo through four non-linear adventures attempting to restore order to the universe. (Why is it that the disorderly universe is always the quest target — why not the disorderly closet or something?) You begin the game as you find Koala hurtling through some type of time warp while traveling in

Golden Gate and **Down in the Dumps**

his TTRV (Trans Temporal Recreation Vehicle). Rummaging through his fez he finds a mysterious piece of parchment which conveys the information that Apocalypse is imminent if something is not done.

To collect the other three pieces of the scroll, players will proceed through the Stream of Consciousness, a surrealistic theme park for adults, The Land of Lost Things, ruled by runaway ventriloquist dummy, Woody Knot, and Eye in the Sky, the robotic space station of Annie Body, the smartest girl in the world. Could be the Best Marsupial Adventure of 1997! (Brøderbund)

Down in the

Partying with the lice

t's summer, but it's cold and rainy and has been for a month. I'm past deadline. Yep, down in the dumps just about sums it up. What? Oh, you mean the game *Down in the Dumps*! Well, that's a whole 'nother story. It seems like our friendly neighborhood alien family, the diminutive Blubs, were involved in a terrible cosmic crash with some less-than-worthies who ran a red dwarf. Both ships happened to fall to Earth, luckily experiencing a soft landing in a local dump (hence the catchy title). The Blubs need to repair their interstellar station wagon so they can continue with their vacation, but the thugs who triggered their troubles are determined to prevent this. It's your job to help the Blurbs out.

While using SVGA rendered characters, *Dumps* developer Haïku Studios is aiming to give the game a cartoon feel throughout, with "near-seamless" links between the descriptive cinematic sequences and the interactive sections. You'll lead various members of the Blub family through different parallel plot lines, featuring traditional adventure, action, and puzzle elements. You'll visit such colorful locales as the dump of the game's title, attend events like a party with lice on a bum's head, and so forth. In an original twist, you'll be able to record your game and play it back in cartoon format, although from what we've seen this isn't a cartoon you'd want to show to Junior (I mean, partying with lice? Ewwww! Next someone'll have us adventuring with roaches...). (Philips)

Ecstatica 2

Warped balls on a rampage

he balls are back. It was hard to expect too much from 1994's *Ecstatica*. Sure, the pictures looked sorta cool, but who would have guessed that such a cute-looking game could have been so sadistic. Born from the twisted mind of developer Andrew Spencer, it combined unusual puzzles and brutal combat scenes in a world brought to life with ellipsoid technology. The balls.

What makes that game particularly brilliant, and what makes

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Heroes of Might and Magic II brings completely new elements to one of the best strategy games of 1995, the first of which is a multi-part, split level campaign. Each scenario in the campaign brings you closer to your goal in this epic struggle of good versus evil. Additional features include two new hero archetypes: Wizard and Necromancer, upgraded multiplayer capabilities, and dozens of new monsters, artifacts and spells.

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Ecstatica 2 so highly anticipated, is the sense that the world is a whole. In the original your character is made from balls, which look weird, but so are the bad guys. They look weird, too. Weirder yet, the textures used for the plants and ground are balls as well. It was an absolute stroke of brilliance, and it made all of the other games that mix every conceivable graphic style look downright dowdy.

Ecstatica 2 finds our hero returning from his first adventure, only to find his castle has been overrun by a demonic horde. Combat figures more substantially in this game, and like the original, the characters wander around the entire environment (who wasn't scared to death that the damn werewolf would attack at any moment?).

The fighting engine has been enhanced, with more attacks and defenses, as well as some slick looking rolls and jumps. The environment is considerably larger, with more camera views. The visuals have been bumped up to SVGA, and a Windows 95 version is in the works.

Curiously enough, the next Spencer project, the ultra-violent *Urban Decay*, will drop the ellipsoid technology which gives this series of games their unique look. *Decay* will use polygons. The reason? No 3D card accelerates ellipses. It's too bad, but hopefully *Ecstatica 2* will send the balls off in style. (Psygnosis)

Net: Zone and Surreal

A cybertechnological virtual reality quest

amTek literature describes *Net: Zone* as "a virtual reality quest" that places you "in an incredible cybertechnology fantasy." With phraseology like that, what more could we say? Plenty, as it turns out. The backstory is that your father, the managing director of a mysterious corporation, has gone missing. His disappearance is believed tied into the corporation's top-secret research into AI, but after a year of no leads the police have given up the chase. They return a "virtual reality interface" taken as evidence, hinting that it was no use in the investigation. Not quite believing this you, kid hacker extraordinaire, crack your father's interface and enter the CYCORP system, where you are shocked to find a cry for help from within cyberspace… a cry from your father. As you begin to explore this non-linear world, you discover more messages from your father and learn of a massive conspiracy to disrupt the world's computer networks. It'll be up to you to rescue your father's mind, rebuild him as an artificial life form, and secure the 'Net so folks can keep on fighting useless flame wars on-line (well, okay–at least secure the 'Net).

The game will be different from your usual 2D adventure fare, featuring instead a 3-D visualization of cyberspace in which you will have 360 degrees of vision (*i.e.*, you'll be able to rotate to see all of a location). The rendered graphics are high res, high color and, if they match the screen shots we've seen, should be pretty stunning. (GameTek)

Simply gorgeous

brother and sister go to the mansion of the artists known as Ruvell. They are there for a private showing. The woman, Serin, decides to get a closer look at one of the pieces, entitled "Avant-Garde," when suddenly it comes to life and pulls her into the artwork. Her brother, Mike, rushes into the room and is himself sucked into the painting.

So begins this gorgeous adventure, with art created by the surrealist Gil Bruvel. The adventure engine, named Eden, allows players to examine, pickup and use any object in any of the pre-rendered locations. Bruvel has created seven distinct areas and over 60 total locations, all of which are richly detailed.

Brian Fargo, CEO of Interplay, is a collector of the artwork of Bruvel. Through a friend, he found out that Bruvel was working on computer-based 3D versions of his art. Fargo approached him to create his art for an adventure game, and development on *Of Light and Darkness* began. With visuals superior to a game like *Myst* (which it's likely to be compared to), we'll have to wait until 1997 to see if the gameplay is equally impressive. (Interplay)

Surreal
Where the computer plays with YOU

Enter the collective unconscious. What a scary thought. But enter you must, if you intend to play *Surreal*, a "provocative mind game…that gives game enthusiasts the ultimate cerebral challenge."

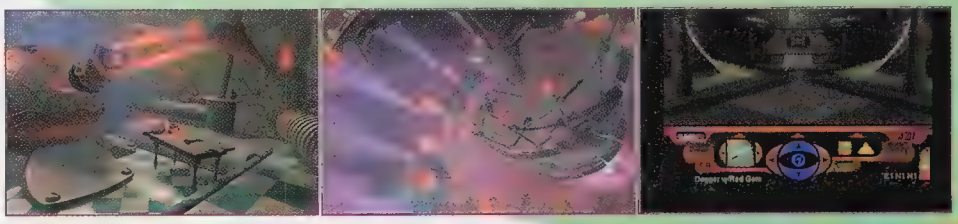
Each level of surreal is connected to a different place in our collective unconscious… you know, that place in which the *déja vu* creature skulks… where dusty boxes of every song lyric you've ever memorized or every movie you've seen lie waiting to be opened and then, at the slightest provocation, out leaps the entire score to *Cats*. Through these linked places, the player must discover the reality of his or her own circumstances in order to advance to the next world.

Nothing is as it seems; the obvious poses as insinuation, fantasy is disguised as reality, Bill Gates is selling pencils at Grand Central Station. As players traverse each dramatically different world, they experience a type of quantum leap, as their decisions transport them from one realm to the next.

Challenge *The Story Teller*, an advance continuum computer which anticipates your actions and manipulates gameplay. "Multiple solutions challenge each player's humanity, wits and virtues." Hey, when my virtue is on the line…there's no turning back. (ASC)

The Secrets
Exploring the rendered innards of a rediscovered pyramd

ust what is it about ruins that excites us? From Indiana Jones flicks to the old Infocom text game *Infidel*, ruins–especially those in pyramidal form–just seem to tickle our imaginations. Vic Tokai hopes to tickle both our imaginations and our senses with their upcoming *Secrets of the Lost Dynasty*. Vic Tokai hasn't released much information on the plot yet, except to say that a mining company has unearthed an Egyptian pyramid dating back to 11,000 B.C., and that you've been rushed in to investigate. You'll get to wander through the rendered innards of the pyramid, choosing a wide variety of paths. The pre-alpha we've seen is quite gloomy, although Vic Tokai tells us that the images are going to be brightened quite a bit for the final release. The pre-alpha also had a huge file containing many of the rendered movement sequences; if these are any indication of the final, this isn't your average dry, dusty pyramid! There even appeared to be several wild sequences reminiscent of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. (Vic Tokai) ■



Of Light and Darkness and The Secret of the Lost Dynasty

Ok, fine, so we've run out of room, but be sure to watch for coverage on some of the following titles in future issues of Computer Games Strategy Plus:

Acclaim
Night of the Monsters - Save classic movie monsters from fiends
Activision
Planetfall - See Floyd reincarnate
Sacred Ground - the second in the series of Sam Egan mysteries
American Laser Games - HER Interactive
The Vampire Diaries - based on romantic thriller novels for teen girls
Atlantean Interactive Games
Bamboozle - Stop Dr. Dungeon from quashing the VanillaVille Ice Cream Factory
The Lords of Tantrazz - Comic book challenge with above the waist development
Byron Preiss
Spider Man: The Sinister Six - Marvel Comics'answer to multimedia
Cyberdreams
Noir - black & white whodunit in the style of classic film *noir*
The Incredible Shrinking Man - the title says it all
Cyberflix
Titanic - Do you get that sinking feeling?
Dreamworks
The Neverhood - Discover the meaning of life in stunning claymation
Fox Interactive
The Simpsons: Virtual Springfield - Doh!
The X Files - FMV takes Gillian Anderson...so would we!
GameTek
Alien Incident - wormhole spawner opens another dimension — enter aliens...
Soul Hunt - occult ritual troubles a crazed professor
GTE
Timelapse - a gorgeous hi-res trek through ancient civilizations
GT Interactive
9 - between 8 and 10
I-Motion
Stardisk - on or off the net, beware of the men in black
Inscape
Safecracker - Solve the combinations leading you to the master safe
Drowned God - View conspiracy theories about the origin of mankind
Egyptian Jukebox - Literally drawers full of puzzles
Interplay
Kingdom: Shadoan - Approach it only with children in tow
Mummy: Tomb of the Pharaoh - Frankenstein goes to Egypt
Konami
Riana Rouge - Abused secretary becomes leather queen
Legend
Callahan's Crosstime Saloon - Spider Robinson's novels pack a poignant punch
MGM Interactive
The Outer Limits - Based on the TV series named...you guessed it!
Nova Spring
Wet Corpse - Alone in the Dark style adventure with a splash
Ocean
Cartoon Network: Zoiks - Recover stolen sounds no one knew were missing
Philips
Cliff Johnson's Labyrinth of Crete - Greek mythology puzzle-hugging
Playmates Interactive
Duckman:The Legend of the Fall - Outwit King Chicken
Psygnosis
The Fallen - Master the art of human interaction
Zombieville - Investigative reporter seeks brain eating zombies
Island of Dr. Moreau - Genetic engineering gone awry — based on the book
Sierra
King's Quest VIII - 7th followup product to (you'll never guess...)
Leisure Suit Larry VII: Love for Sail - 6th followup product to (er...)
Lighthouse - may be on the shelf at this printing...sci-fi fantasy
Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh - gore and sex — together again
Rama - Based on Arthur C. Clarke's and Gentry Lee's series
The Time Warp of Dr. Brain - 3rd follow up product to... (Is a pattern emerging?)
Simon & Schuster
Star Trek Borg: Experience the Collective - Another Star Trek immersion
Starship Titanic - By Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide...*). Find Earth!
Viacom
Star Trek: Voyager - Drool, trekkies, drool
Westwood Studios
Blade Runner - Be a blade runner...all the world loves a blade runner
Zombie
ZPG - stands for zero population growth... a sterilization sim, perhaps?

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by Steve Wartofsky

Air Warrior II

The granddaddy of online games, turns the tables and heads for offline play

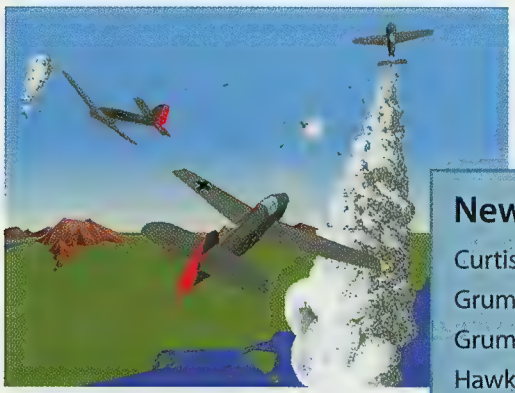
After a long stretch of development (from a player's point of view, at least), the good news is that Kesmai has spent many thousands of dollars and countless hours gathering detailed imagery of historical aircraft cockpits from around the world. The main visual improvement for the boxed, single-player version of the game will thus be in the cockpit art. Along with its legendary optimized flight model – unique in the industry for being tested, redesigned and refined over years of responsiveness to player input – *Air Warrior II*'s aircraft and mission sets will be expanded significantly for this new release (based on the version 2.0 online software Kesmai is currently supporting). Expect more than 100 offline missions available for training, at least eight new aircraft to add to the software's current hangar-full of 26, a full onscreen aircraft and ground vehicle reference guide (available during play), and, perhaps most importantly of all, detailed options for varying difficulty and performance levels. As can be seen from the screenshot, the ground terrain has finally moved beyond the flat pancake it's always been, and now includes rudimentary terrain features, which can be used for hiding from other aircraft.

The computer AI for this version of the game will be sufficiently developed to provide as much of a challenge to solo players offline as they would get against a veteran crew of *Air Warrior* players on-line. If anything, the designers and testers of the software in development worry about whether they should ease off the AI challenge, to make the game more accessible for newcomers. It's a tricky balance to manage; you need to make the game playable for newcomers, but need to offer enough challenge that they'll be sufficiently trained to survive an online session (if desired) with some success. Solution: full control of such factors as aircraft durability, ammo limits, gunnery lethality, enemy and friendly (yes, there are wingmen) AI quality, and flight parameters (spin, stall, and buffeting models, redouts, blackouts, etc.). As has been the tradition with this engine, *Air Warrior II* will give players the chance to put together the kind of game *they'd* like to play, at all levels of expertise.

The main goal of the boxed, single-player version of this game has to be whether or not it can get people revved up for online play. Kesmai has attempted this experiment before, with an earlier, boxed version of *Air Warrior*; this time around, it looks like – in collaboration with Interactive Magic – the company will be able to provide players enough training material to get to the point where they'll feel immediately comfortable – and competent – in the heady, challenging, and sometimes frustrating world of online multi-player air combat; and enough immediate gratification to enjoy the software in its own right. ■

▲ The most dedicated crew of computer flight enthusiasts ever assembled in one place. These guys know how to make this stuff fun

▲ Hand-drawn artwork really improves the period feel of the design

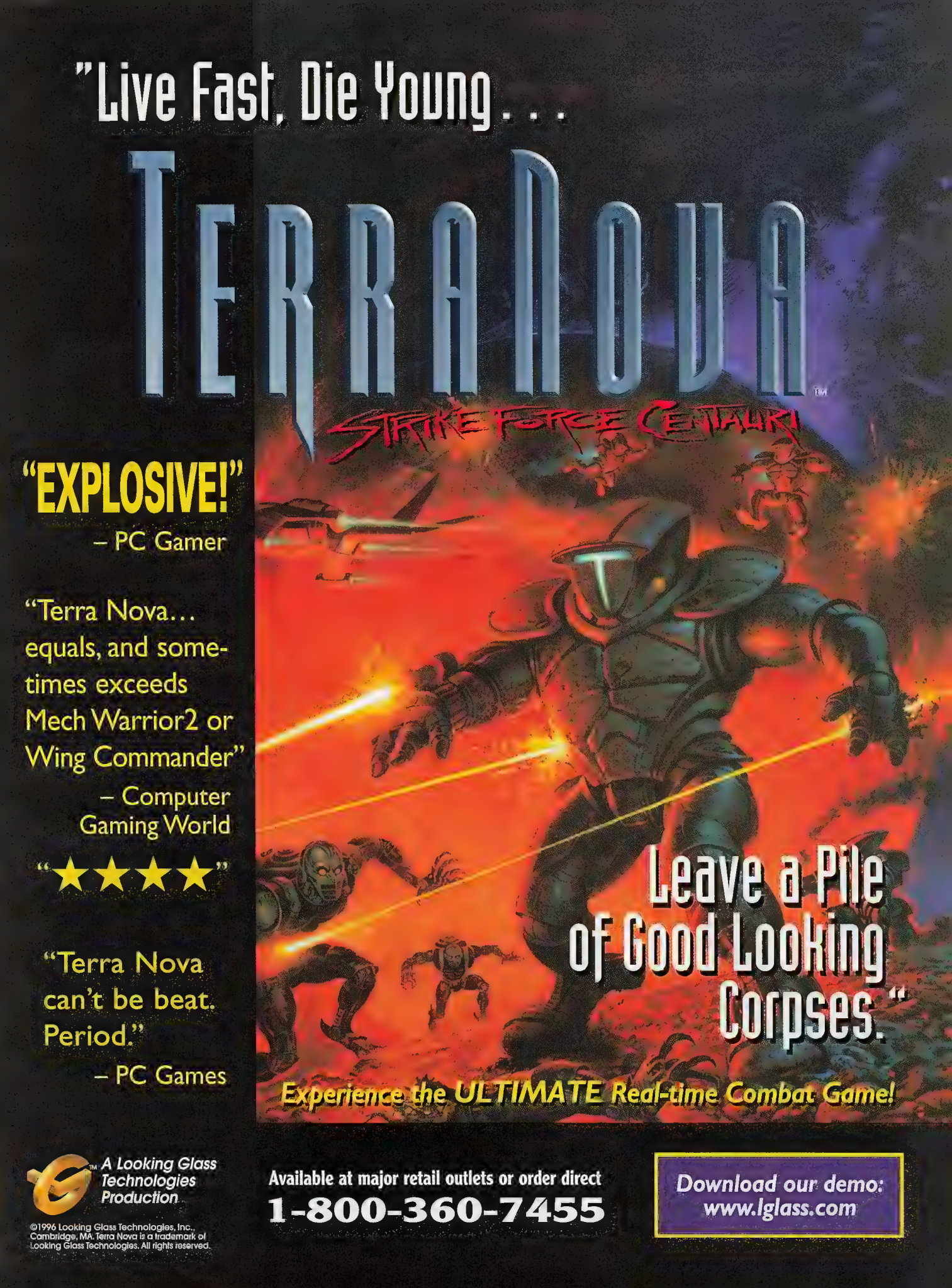


◀ Air combat's finally starting to look like something with this revision!

New Air Warrior II aircraft:

- Curtiss P-40D Tomahawk (USA)
- Grumman TFM-3 Avenger (US Navy)
- Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat (US Navy)
- Hawker Hurricane II (UK)
- Ilyushin IL-2 Sturmovik (USSR)
- Ju-87 Stuka (Germany)
- Lavochkin La-5 (USSR)
- Messerschmitt Me-110 C4 (Germany)

◀ Now this is what a WWII fur-ball should look like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by Steve Wartofsky

Best-looking civilian cockpit we've seen yet!

Flight Assignment: Air Transport Pilot

Pilot Pro picks up where subLogic's ATP and Flight left off

Anyone who's familiar with *Flight Assignment: Air Transport Pilot* needs little information to wax enthusiastic about the news that Sierra – having acquired subLogic – will be meshing the 3Space 3D technology developed by Dynamix with the full-scale flight certification simulation subLogic has had on its hands for awhile now.

The only major fault fans of *ATP* ever found with the original design was its rudimentary graphics. Even now, though the simulation was developed to run well on a 286, it still works quite well on a recent-model Pentium, a testament to robustness of coding little else in the industry can lay claim to. What a joy to imagine an *ATP*-like sim fully realized in a cutting-edge 3D graphics environment!

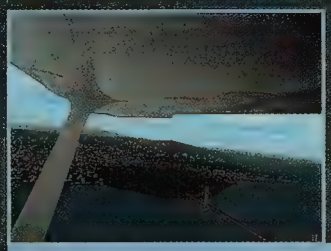
As can be seen from the accompanying screenshots, while the outside graphics look to be top-notch, the real heart of this design will be in the cockpit and cockpit instrumentation. Since Sierra's plans are to put together a simulation so realistic it'll operate effectively as a first step towards full, private pilot certification (your real-world piloting classes will go more quickly and thus probably cost less after training with this software), the core of the work is obviously going to have to be done on the realism of instrumentation and flight control performance. The original *ATP* "real-time air traffic control" system – still unmatched in the world of flight simulation – should evolve into an interactive training system in *Pilot Pro,* one which will give the player immediate feedback and instruction in response to what s/he's doing with the plane in flight.

The original ATP "real-time air traffic control" system – still unmatched in the world of flight simulation – should evolve into an interactive training system in Pilot Pro, one which will give the player immediate feedback and instruction in response to what s/he's doing with the plane in flight

Included modeled aircraft will be the standard Cessna 172 Skyhawk trainer, the Beechcraft Bonanza, Beechcraft Super King 300, Cessna 185 (with floats) and Cessna CitationJet. Each will conform exactingly to real-world flight information data, and will be available to the player for independent certification. Start by obtaining a private certificate, then graduate to getting rated for all the other included aircraft. Grades are given (as they were with the original *ATP*) for safety, efficiency and airmanship.

The simulation will offer twenty fully-modeled metropolitan areas, over 2500 airports stretched across the US and Canada, and all major railroads, rivers and lakes, to make VFR cross country flight an easily manageable option. Full sound support will immerse the player in air traffic control messages, voice instruction from the flight instructor or info from the co-pilot, even voice communications from other aircraft within communications range. One thing *ATP* was noted for early on was the substantial – and relatively accurate – database of carefully placed airports and elevations. That legacy sounds like it will be maintained here in Sierra's evolution of the original technology.

Combine the instrument sophistication of subLogic's early work, the beautiful detail of Sierra/Dynamix' 3Space technology, and an obvious interest in pulling together a full-scale simulation, and you've got a product evolving much more quickly than most current civilian flight simulation efforts. We certainly hope those involved will have success with this project. ■



Look at the photo-realism of that wing out your window

If all these gauges work, we'll be in airplane tweak heaven

TEST YOUR METTLE!

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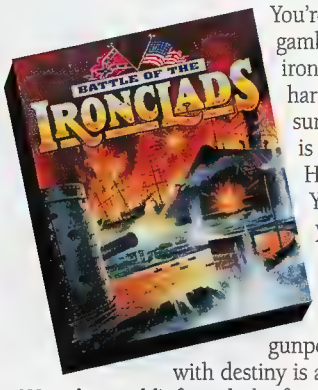

You're captain of the Merrimack, the Confederacy's gamble on future technology: a seemingly indestructible ironclad warship. Union gunfire bounces harmlessly off your metal sides. You've rammed and sunk the wooden warship Cumberland; the Congress is scorching the late afternoon sky. The waters of Hampton Roads are littered with bodies and debris. You're bearing down on the ailing Minnesota for your third kill of the day.

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View From The Monitor

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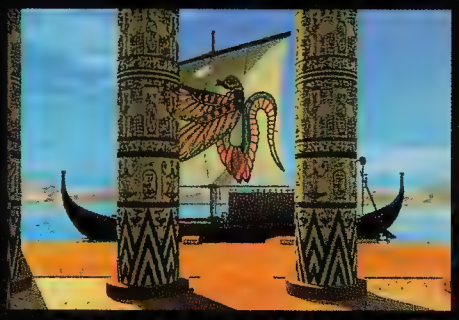

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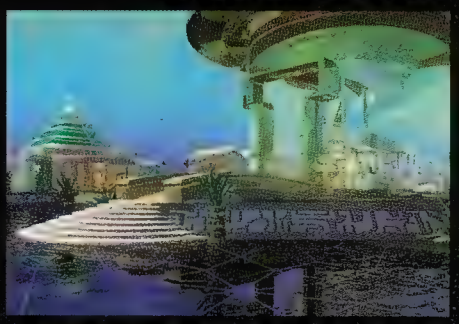

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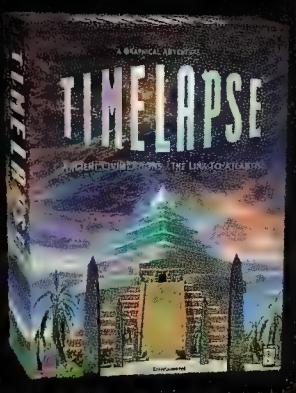

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by Steve Wartofsky

Star Trek Starfleet Academy

Interplay Applies 3D to the Prime Directive; or, How to Do First-Person Action Without a Big Gun in Your Hand

With promises of "cutting-edge 3D graphics" (who won't make such a claim these days?) and "real-time flight simulation/action play" (want to guess whether the emphasis will be on the latter or the former?), the basic direction of this upcoming product from Interplay seems clear. Stay true to the *Star Trek* universe, and make sure you keep the fans of fly 'n shoot space games satisfied while you're at it.

What simulation comes into play in this product will, of course, be fanciful; given the *Star Trek* licensing, Interplay will once again make a serious effort to provide as much of the look and feel of the USS Enterprise, while giving the player plenty of 3D space flight to work through, with 27 planned missions in a training scenario (thus the Starfleet Academy of the title).

Your role is to play a cadet, training to be a Starfleet officer; as you progress through the game, you get advice and instruction from Kirk, Chekov, Sulu and others, who introduce you to the nitty-gritty of the Star Trek officer corps. While emphasis is on action, promises of a sub-plot, compelling storyline and politics and subterfuge suggest an ongoing adventure-game (or adventure-game-like) element as well; the original actors from the original series (Shatner, Koenig and Takei, specifically) will recreate their original roles for newly-shot full-motion video sequences, all designed to help you stay in touch with the essential atmosphere of Star Trek. The moral universe of Star Trek – which posits violence as the last recourse, rather than the first, in any encounter (kind of the reverse of our present reality, the series started in the 60s, guess you had to be there to understand…) – means that players will have to develop a "think before you shoot" mentality. First-person 3D action game fans need not apply, unless they're willing to stretch a little here.

Technically, *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy* will make use of such advanced graphics techniques as translucent texture mapping, which allow you to see "through" objects – useful for such things as cloaking and de-cloaking; "filming," a technique which gives the designer the opportunity to blend characters into an environment without having to do all the labor-intensive work of creating proper light-sourcing, shadowing, etc.; and real-time color light-sourcing, which should provide much subtler shading as objects change position in relation to each other and to the main source of light. The AI planned for the game will make use of techniques which allow the designers to essentially "train" various ships to perform with certain kinds of responses in various situations, thus giving combat more nuance and variety.

The number of ships planned for the player side is currently at eight (pending licensing approval); many more are included as allies and other components present in the 27-mission combat training environment. Klingons, Romulans, saboteurs, rebels and more will be found over the course of training.

Both graphically and technically, *Starfleet Academy* will no doubt be right at the forefront of the kind of technology Interplay has most recently come to be known for, with its smash success story *Descent/Descent II*; the interesting question will be how this kind of technology will be put to use – perhaps, for the first time – in an environment where scoot 'n shoot isn't the automatic order of the day. We're eager to see how this will work out. ■

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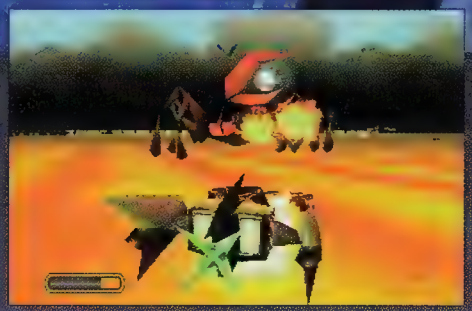

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by Scott Udell

Grumble, Grumble

Gosh, it's fun to be a grognard!

I recently returned from a week or so of vacation wrapped around one day of work: a visit to the southwestern Missouri Civil War battleground of Wilson's Creek (located just outside of Springfield), doing research for what I hope will be an upcoming design tips article for SSI's *Age of Rifles* (assuming they don't beat me to it; SSI is known for including some obscure battles in its titles). I came away with some sunburn, an armload of maps and publications describing this mostly forgotten battle, and some additional thoughts on our hobby of wargaming.

Wargaming is still far from perfect

While wandering through the small visitors' center, one of the park rangers, having heard that I was involved in doing a game on Wilson's Creek, came up to me to chat a bit. During our conversation, he expressed his sincere hope that any game of the battle would include the surprise and, especially, the confusion that marked this hot day in August; otherwise, he said, it's just not Wilson's Creek. Prior to the battle the Union commander – General Lyon – agreed to the plan of one of his subordinates, Col. Franz Sigel, to split the Federal forces, attacking with his main body from the northwest and allowing Sigel to take his brigade around to attack from the south, catching the Confederates in a pincer movement. The two

Some for-fun grognard grumblings about Shiloh: the supply wagon (A) is not only on what I feel is the wrong side of Wilson's Creek, it's on the wrong side of the Confederate troops west of the creek and vulnerable to sneak attack. The 5th Arkasas (B) should start the scenario right (north) of Reid's battery, not on its left (south) side

Age of Rifles' updated look

forces weren't in communication; Sigel's signal to attack was to be the sound of Lyon's troops firing in the north. Things started generally as planned, but confusion soon set in. At a critical point Sigel saw what he thought were gray-clad Union troops (early in the War uniforms were often a confusing mix of colors and styles) approaching from the area of Lyon's assault; these troops approached to within 30 yards of Sigel's position when they opened up with a devastating fire that soon led to the route of Sigel's entire force (a similar bit of confusion happened in the north). With Sigel's force gone, the Confederates were able to concentrate upon Lyon's troops on what was to become known as Bloody Hill, eventually (after the death of Lyon, the first general officer killed in the war) forcing them to quit the battlefield.

So, what does this have to do with the imperfections of wargaming? Well, consider the split Union force: in those days, communications might at best be by signal tower or, rarely, battlefield telegraph (on larger, more prepared battlefields) but for the most part was via courier (on horseback if a commander was lucky, on foot otherwise; SSI's old *Waterloo* is the only computer wargame I'm familiar with which models couriers and, incidentally, gives gamers the option to play with an imperfect, but realistic, commander's perspective). The courier could get killed, captured, or lost; often a commander would have only the vaguest notion of what his own forces were doing, let alone the actions of his allied commands (to say the least of the enemy!).

Computer wargames, while finally implementing fog-of-war *vis-a-vis* enemy forces, often give us unrealistic control of our *own* forces. Take, for example, TalonSoft's *Battleground: Shiloh* (not because it's any more guilty of this than other games; it was just the first one I got a-hold of which had a Wilson's Creek recreation). In this game players always know where their own forces are, even when routed or, in the case of Wilson's Creek, detached forces like those under Sigel's control. Such knowledge of the battlefield would be the envy of a modern commander, let alone that of one from 130 years ago! In *Shiloh* you can turn on computer control and close your eyes while the computer moves Sigel's troops for you, but this remains a less-than-satisfactory method, and certainly doesn't take into consideration the element of confusion/misidentification that

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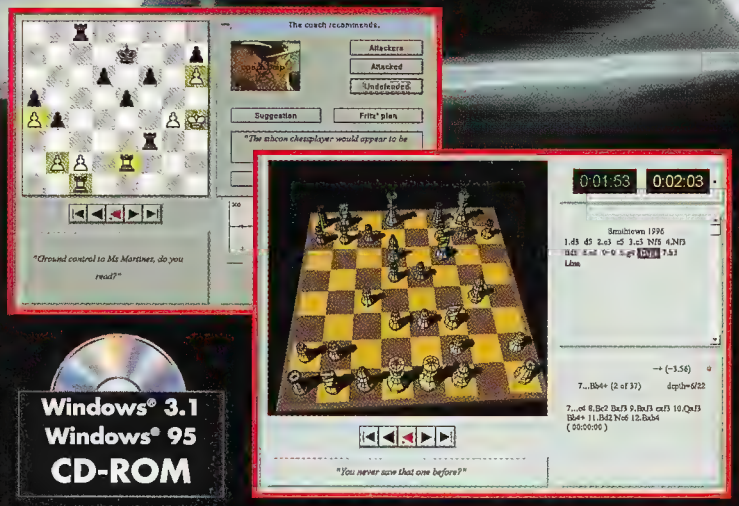

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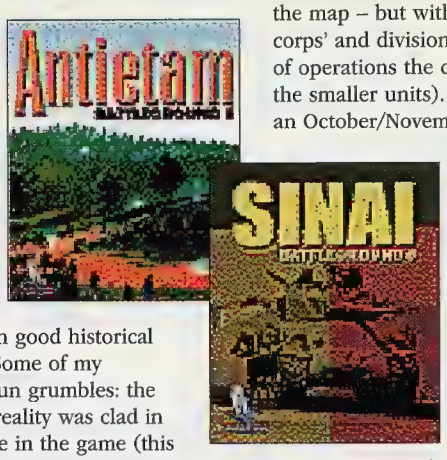
is/was very common on actual battlefields; there's no chance you'll confuse enemy troops for your own.

Now, to be fair to TalonSoft, this is a problem I've seen with every computer wargame I've played, and is one I suspect is a left-over from the hobby's board gaming days. Computer wargames have taken the first steps beyond their board game brethren with features like fog-of-war, AI opponents (okay, so we're still working on this one), automatic set-ups, concurrent turn execution, and so forth (note: most of these can be accomplished in board games, if with some difficulty and usually not, in the case of fog-of-war, with fewer than three people). It's time for computer wargame designers to advance the state of their art, and to start more explorations into things like imperfect command and control, allied forces not under the player's control, and more battlefield confusion.

TalonSoft's latest: Battleground: Shiloh

A little grognard fun

Several months ago I said here in Command Post that I'm a *grognard* wannabee. Well, with *Shiloh*'s Wilson's Creek scenarios I finally know enough about a battle (and have the references to back me up) to perform a little bit of *grognard-y* grumbling, and in so doing have learned one of the secrets of these hardcore gamers: it's actually a lot of fun to find a questionable detail, to pour over maps and books to be able to say "Aha! I think the 5th Arkansas under Pearce is out of position!" I disagree with the *grognards*, though, when they act like such revelations ruin a game; it can still be fun *as a game*, and, more often than not, it's still a pretty darn good historical recreation as well. Some of my Wilson's Creek for-fun grumbles: the 1st Iowa, which in reality was clad in gray, is wearing blue in the game (this is significant, because these are the troops Sigel thought were approaching his position when instead it was the Confederate 3rd Louisiana); most of my sources show the Confederate supply wagons on the eastern side of Wilson's creek, not the western as in the game (not terribly significant, except for the wagon at hex 20,10; it's also just west of Confederate troops and is often an easy target for the Union player); and lastly, the aforementioned positioning of the 5th Arkansas – my sources don't agree exactly (they switch the 5th and the 4th about), but all agree that the 5th was not south of Reid's battery, as it is in the game. Does any of this really detract from playing the game? Not really, but golly was it fun to come up with!



Intell Report

TalonSoft's next *Battleground* title, *Antietam*, will also include at least one extra small battle (right now they're looking at the battle of Small Mountain). Antietam is due out early this Fall, while *Battleground: Sinai* will probably not be released until early '97, slipped in part because of the (planned) November release of TalonSoft's first game of naval combat, *Age of Sail*. A bit of a surprise, it will use a real-time version of their gaming engine.

Wargame developer Arsenal Publishing (of *TacOps* fame) has adjusted the release dates on several projects. It looks like the only new game we'll see from them this year is *Road to Moscow*, a massive game of strategic Eastern Front combat during World War II. The game will be continuous-time (although not of the frantic pace of, say, *Command & Conquer* or *Close Combat*) instead of turn-based, will keep track of units down to the company level (as players, you might command corps or divisions – all that will be represented graphically on the map – but within your corps' and divisions' areas of operations the computer will be tracking the smaller units). They are now looking at an October/November time frame for release, although a demo (called *Road to Stalingrad*) should be available sooner.

Arsenal may also be releasing the *TacOps Battlebook*, a complete strategy guide for their modern wargame (it'll be hard to top the excellent manual included with the Windows version of the game). Much of the material for the book has been gathered and most of the text has been written; they just want to prepare a set of graphical comparative weapons analysis charts to round out the project.

Other Arsenal products include *Pacific Tide*, a strategic-level game of WW II in the Pacific (now first quarter '97); *Weapons Free*, a game of modern naval combat (now 2nd quarter '97); and *Panzers East*, the update of the *TacOps* engine that covers Eastern Front tactical combat (now slipped to 3rd quarter '97). After that they're pondering a second game in the *Road to Moscow* series or a first-person tactical combat game (*not* a *Doom*-clone/arcade game, but a realistic combat sim) and, of course, *TacOps II*.

SSI visited early in July to bring us up to date on their products for the rest of the year. We saw *Age of Rifles* (now an August release), *Steel Panthers II* (October), *Warwind* (September), and *Star General* (October). A new add-on that should be out by the time you read this is a *Steel Panthers Campaign Disk*, which will add three new campaigns (North Africa, Operation Barbarossa, and the operations of Patton's 3rd Army) and 35 scenarios. A warning to hard-core *Panthers* fans who've purchased *Steel Panthers* scenarios from Novastar (see Command Post in the August issue): all but the Patton's 3rd Army campaign are from Novastar's collections (although SSI tells us the two Novastar-provided 'campaigns'–which were really just scenario collections–have been linked together for this package). Even if you have some Novastar sets, $19.95 for SSI's package is a great deal.

7th Level's Dominion, one of the better looking C&C clones we should be seeing soon

Signing Off

Well, that's it for this month. As I write this in July, the first rumbles of the holiday release season can be heard from over the horizon. While it may not be as rich a wargaming year as I'd hoped, quality does seem to be on the rise; if you want plentitude, however, you're going to have to jump over into the land of *C&C/Warcraft II* clones, in which we should be drowning by the time you read this. ■

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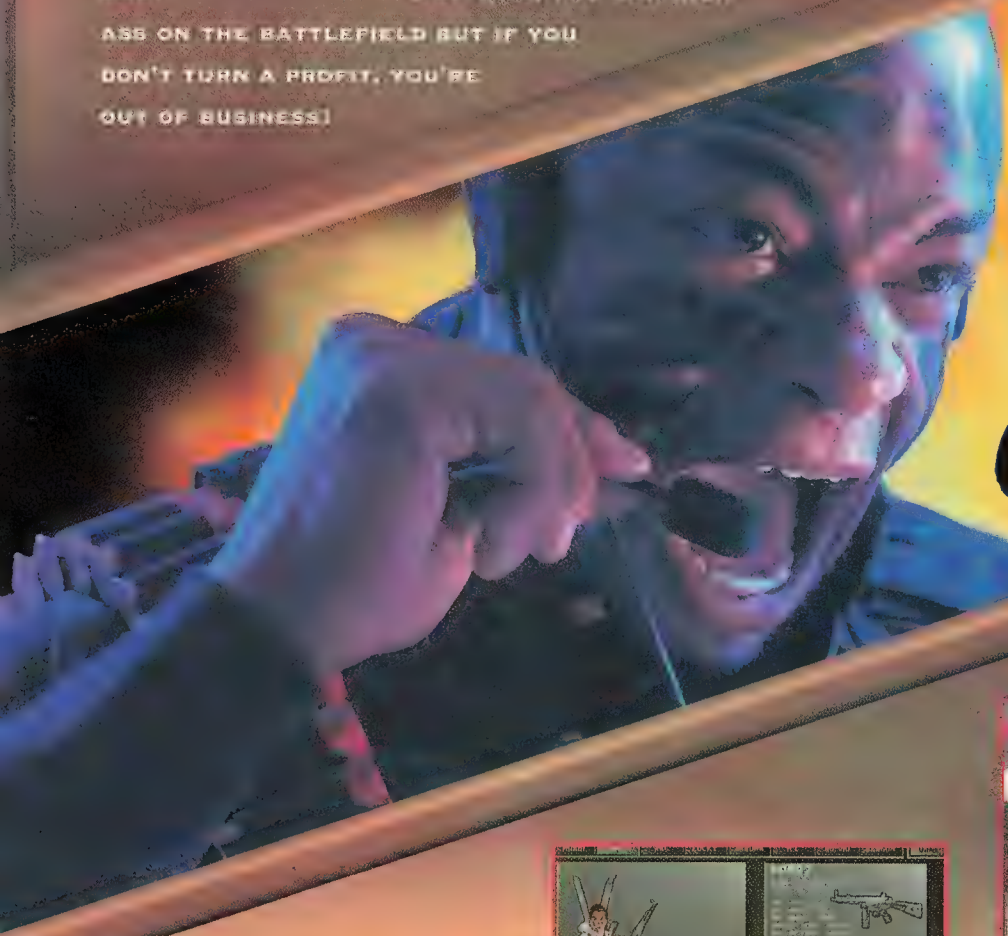

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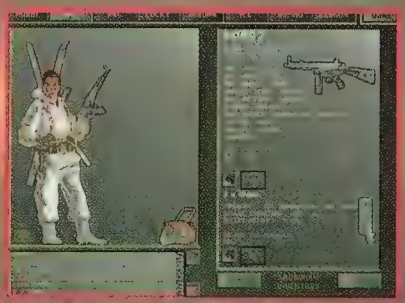

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Divine Comedy, or Paradise Lost?

Afterlife

LucasArts

DOS, Windows 95

★★★☆☆

Clockwise from upper left:
Flesh Rending Machines? Uh, I guess this is in Hell, right?

Bahbbi-Zho's Drive-Ins: A reward for the chaste that should correct that problem right away

Jasper and Arial give you the scoop on how you're screwing up

Hmm, what sins should I encourage this eon?

Milton gave us Satan, who though fallen, still defied Heaven in the false majesty of his pride. Dante gave us Hell entire, complete with all the perversity and horror the medieval imagination could provide, and threw in Purgatory and Paradise for good measure. Now, some centuries later, LucasArts has given us *Afterlife*, the latest in a gaming genre that began lo these many years ago with Maxis' *SimCity*. Whereas Milton and Dante only let you read about paradise and perdition, however, LucasArts lets you actually build and operate the hereafter. No, you don't get to play God, but you do get to put on the robes of a demiurge, a sort of cosmic middle manager tasked by the Powers That Be to cater to the whims of a planet full of EMBOs (Ethically Mature Biological Organisms). These EMBOs worry about their SOULs (Stuff Of Unending Life), and it's the demiurge's job to make sure those SOULs go where the EMBOs believe they will, after they snuff it. In a case of "be careful what you ask for…," whatever fate an EMBO imagines awaits it becomes reality upon leaving the world of the living.

In *Afterlife*, you don't get quite the majesty of Milton's prose or Dante's verse, but you do get a collection of some of the funniest satires on modern mores and morals ever put on a CD-ROM. Punishments for envy vie with rewards for contentment, and while the Taco Inferno may await the gluttonous, the Food Court of the Gods awaits the temperate. You also get excellent graphics depicting the various structures and features of Heaven or Hell, evocative music, and some top-notch voice acting in the roles of Jasper Wormwood and Arial Goodhalo, the spokespeople of Hell (Jasper) and Heaven (Arial) who double as tutors and advisors throughout the game. All in all, a class presentation, with one glaring exception treated below.

Conceptually, *Afterlife* is conventional. You start with a more or less empty grid, zoned for structures designed either to punish or reward the SOULs, and manage your cash flow. In this case, income comes from helping SOULs find their expected just rewards, and arrives in the form of pennies from heaven. Pennies support maintenance, wages for demons and angels, new construction, and the like. You can even alter things like technology and the types of sins on the planet you serve. There is no real goal, save staving off the arrival of the Four Surfers of the Apocalypso, and no defined end; after all, the afterlife is forever, right? Karma Trains for the reincarnated, an exquisite variety of witty rewards and punishments, and a generally wacky sense of humor are this game's highlights. A rather complete set of observation and monitoring tools are available, and the on-line help is amusing and somewhat informative. Graphically, the design is cluttered but sometimes beautiful; most icons are relatively easy to figure out, if rather small at higher resolutions.

The concept for *Afterlife* is superb, the execution is polished and up to LucasArt's high standards. Why, then, does the game seem so, well, terrestrial? Probably because despite the often hilarious descriptions of structures and features you can build (the Taco Inferno and Slide Show of the Gods are two of my favorites), in the end they're just, well, structures. Roads are roads (though in Hell you should make them as *in*efficient as possible), buildings are buildings, and so on; the only difference between *Afterlife* and *SimCity 2000* is that Maxis' game has more terrain options and is easier to get around in. The first few times playing the game are a blast, as you read the descriptions of the buildings and get your karma trains rolling. After a while, though, it's just another balance the budget game.

Afterlife is probably more difficult than most sim games, too. It puts both Heaven and Hell in front of you, with the world (and various karma portals, for the reincarnation believers among the EMBOs) in between; you generally have to manage two complete "worlds" simultaneously, and navigating between the two can prove difficult. Color coding is extensive, and generally effective, but some colors are hard to tell apart, and at higher resolutions things get awful small (the closest zoom is rather pixelated, too). The biggest Lord of the Flies in this ointment, though, and the glaring exception to the otherwise exceptional production values of this game, is the lack of a decent manual. The jewel case booklet is colorful, and covers most of the basics, but there is almost no hard data; you end up like Dante lost in the woods, with no Virgil in sight. Even the tutorial, which features some hilarious repartee between Jasper and Arial, fails to shed much light on what goes on beyond the pearly gates, and omits several critical points about Gates, vibes, and zoning. The hint book, at $19.95, is precisely what the manual should have been: a primer on running the game and a source for the information you need to do well.

Once you *do* figure out what to do, well, you go and do it, and that's about it. Beyond the humor, *Afterlife* doesn't offer much that other sim games don't, though it does do what it does rather well. Should budding godlings spend their manna on this Gnostic vision of life after death? Gamers happy with the conventions of the sim genre, and possessed of an irreverent sense of humor, should find *Afterlife* beatific, if not particularly innovative. If you aren't real thrilled with the idea of another software toy for your hard drive, you might find *Afterlife* less than heavenly; it doesn't really offer much new or compelling for the sim-challenged. I for one found the lack of a useful manual a demonic strike against this game, costing it a full star. *Afterlife* is still a quality product, though, polished and sometimes hilarious. After all, how often do you get the chance to both reign in Hell *and* serve in Heaven? Just be sure to get the hint book if you're serious about this god stuff. *–Robert Mayer*

Battleground: Shiloh

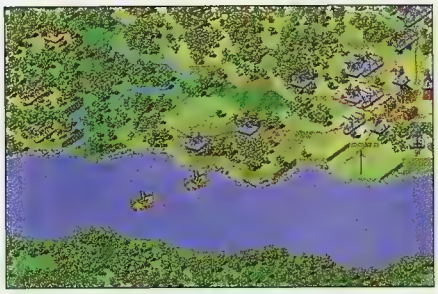
Talonsoft

Windows

★★★★☆

I'm not sure exactly what's happening, but each time I get a new game in the *Battleground* series from TalonSoft, I like it better; perhaps I'm just getting more familiar with the user interface, more familiar with the conflicts, or perhaps the games themselves are just getting better, but I have to say their latest, *Battleground: Shiloh*, is my favorite to date. The game primarily covers the title American Civil War battle of Shiloh, Tennessee (6-7 April, 1862) but also (in a first for the *Battleground* series) covers two smaller battles: Wilson's Creek, Missouri (10 August, 1861) and Prairie Grove, Arkansas (7 December, 1862).

Functionally, the game is very close to *Battleground: Gettysburg*; the "extras" like skirmishers, extended lines, larger hex scales, etc, added to the system for *Battleground: Waterloo* were primarily there to support gaming of Napoleonic warfare, and have now been removed. New, however, to *Gettysburg* players are enhanced multiplayer options (hot-seat play *with* fog-of-war and PBEM), a play balancing feature, varied reinforcement schedules, and a battle recorder feature (I wish they'd added the ability to stop the replay at any point and start playing the game from that point). A feature added specifically for *Shiloh* is waterborne support, in the form of two gunboats for some of the Shiloh scenarios. A suggestion to TalonSoft: future releases should have a section in the



Gunboats have been added for Shiloh; woe unto any Confederate units that get in direct fire range of them!

documentation labeled "What's new for *Battleground: X*" so owners of your previous games don't have to read through all the documentation to find the features new or unique to the particular game.

The documentation includes a decent 48 page manual and a mix of on-line help and data; I particularly approve of the way they handled historical backgrounding, with information leading up to the battles included in the paper manual and the results of the actual battles on-line. This lets gamers who want to play a battle they aren't familiar with catch up on its history without spoiling the "fog-of-war" by detailing unit placements, reinforcements, and tactics used historically. TalonSoft is also justifiably proud of the music provided by Bobby Horton (as I write this I have the game loaded in the background just so I can listen).

While I've played several of the actual Shiloh scenarios, my litmus test of the game was to try out the two smaller battles: Wilson's Creek, which I've studied recently, and Prairie Grove, which I'd never heard of. Playing Union in Wilson's Creek, I whupped the AI opponent (historically, it was a Confederate victory), but I was able to use my knowledge of the battle to my advantage (for more discussion of this part of *Shiloh*, as well as some for-fun *grognard* grumblings, see this month's Command Post). Again, playing the Union at Prairie Grove, however, the computer whupped *me* (in part, however, because of the timely recapture of a Confederate objective by one of their reinforcing supply wagons…!). It turned out my actions almost exactly duplicated the historical Union actions at Prairie Grove (at first I though the AI was being too cautious, but read later that it acted much like the Confederates did); the reason I lost was because the AI didn't crumble, and I also recklessly endangered too many of my troops. It says something about *Shiloh* that both approaches to play were a lot of fun.

The AI, in general, is improved over that in Gettysburg. I still think it's much better on the defensive than on the offensive, but at least now it does a pretty good job of forming its troops into lines of battle. As in *Gettysburg*, it remains blithely unaware of objectives – I can often penetrate a lone unit into the AI's rear areas (or even into the midst of a batch of units), capture an objective, get routed or destroyed, and still remain in control of that objective for the rest of the game) – and it seems a bit gun-shy (I've seen it retreat a lot when it should be advancing, even from something as weak as a unitless leader; of course, now at least it does its retreat in very good order).

While the full Shiloh scenario (and some of the longer subsets, and alternate history scenarios) are still huge, they're not quite as long as either *Gettysburg* or *Waterloo*, and don't seem as quite as overwhelming (for example, in the full Shiloh campaign I have underway, I'm not getting the feeling of "counter-pushing" I had with the earlier games; perhaps this just means I'm learning!). Despite this, I like the shorter games, and therefore praise TalonSoft for including the two smaller battles; you can now complete an entire battle in an evening easily, something this busy gamer really appreciates. In fact, I encourage TalonSoft to consider releasing a game composed entirely of such smaller battles. *–Scott Udell*

Tigers on the Prowl 2

HPS Simulations

DOS

★★★★½

Gamers interested in WWII tactical level combat will be pleased to learn that *Tigers on the Prowl*, HPS Simulations' painstakingly detailed depiction of *Ostfront* combined arms operations, is now available in a new and improved version. Thanks to a revised interface, *Tigers on the Prowl 2* is easier to play than its predecessor, while incorporating new features to add more depth and realism to the original game.

Effective command and control is a central theme in *TOP 2*. Unlike many tactical level simulations, in *TOP 2* units will not necessarily do your bidding immediately after being issued an order. Instructions must be carried through a chain of command and, depending on circumstances, a delay of several turns may occur before a unit will respond. HQs are particularly important in getting your forces to operate cohesively: lose your battalion HQ and some of your companies may go charging ahead while others hang back "waiting for the word." Control freaks may not find *TOP 2*'s consideration of communication delays to be their cup of tea, but it does add greatly to the game's realism.

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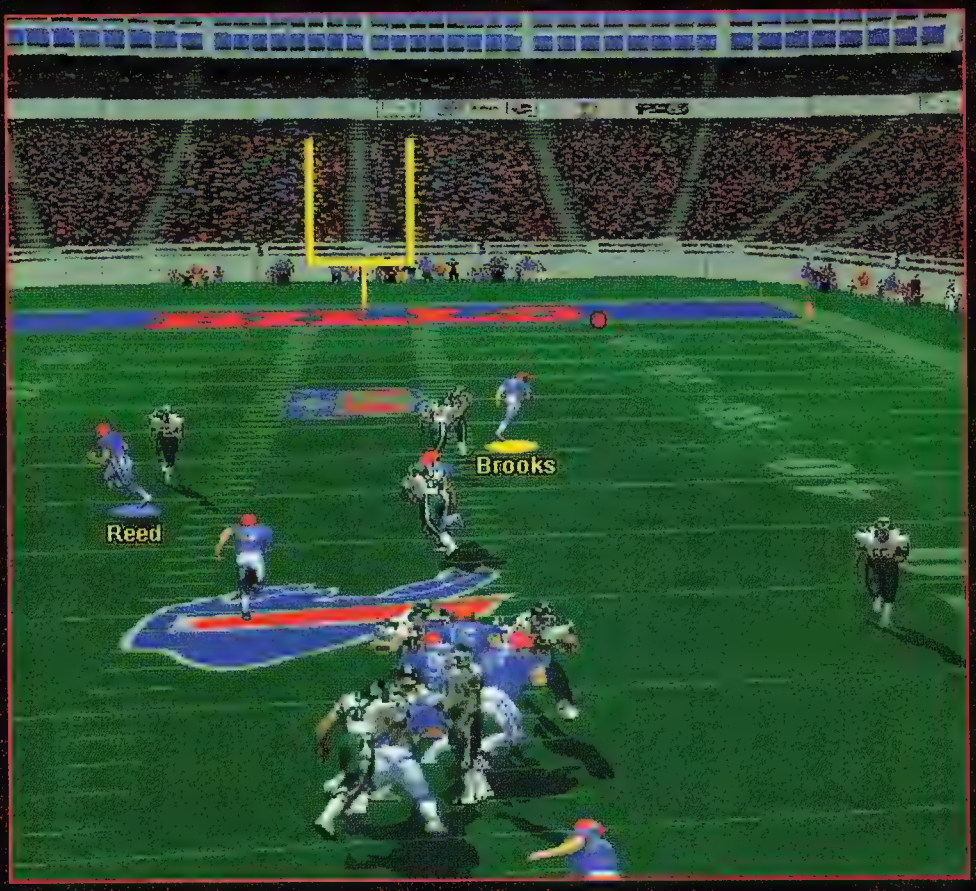

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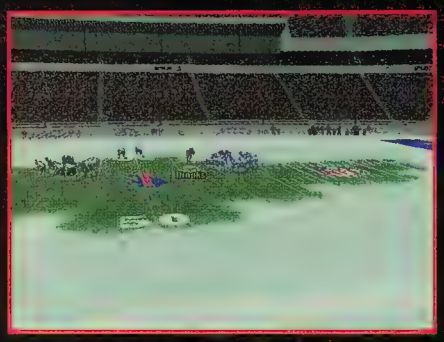

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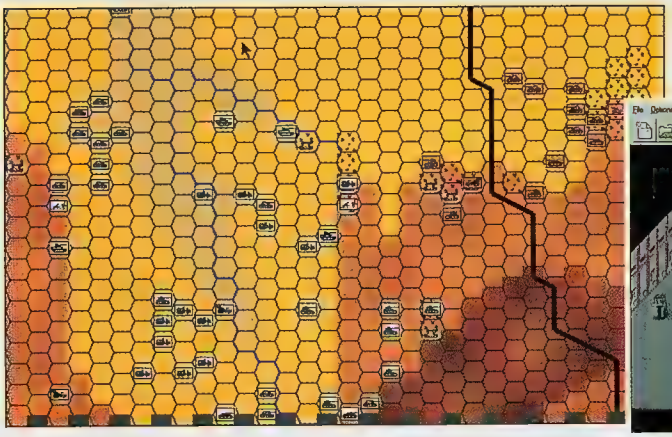
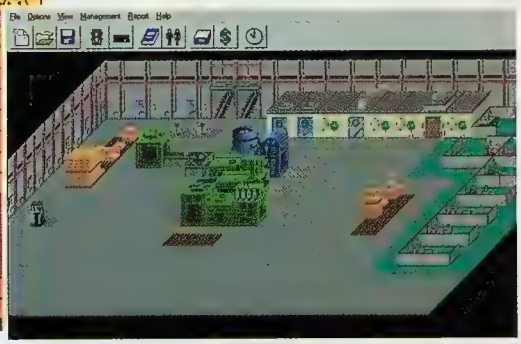


Tigers on the Prowl II



Free Enterprise

A fundamental improvement made in the user interface is the addition of a "Consult Staff" menu. Your "staff" will quickly provide you with information regarding the combat strengths of your units, their ammunition supply, the length of time it will take for them to respond to your orders, and targeting data. The data are presented in table form, making it easier to grasp the big picture and select your courses of action.

TOP 2 furnishes an exhaustive database of almost 800 weapons (not including small arms types) covering almost every imaginable piece of hardware used by Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, Finland, Poland, Hungary, and Rumania during the war on the Eastern Front. There is detailed technical data available on-screen for each weapon, including an impressive amount of ballistic information. Although setting up your own battles can be involved, the database together with *TOP 2*'s scenario editor gives you the capability to game out almost any conceivable situation.

Obstacles, flamethrower tanks, air drops, carpet bombing, engineers, mines, WP ammunition, bridge demolition, dust trails….there is little that is not covered by *TOP 2*. Aimed at the more experienced gamer, novices may find themselves overwhelmed by *TOP 2*'s attention to detail. For us *grognards*, however, this is a must-buy!
–Rex Whitfield

Free Enterpri$e

Tsunami

Windows 95

★★★☆☆

Back in the May issue I previewed this little business simulation called *Free Enterpri$e*; in that preview, I called it "almost a 'SimBoss' kind of game." After playing the final version of the game for quite a few hours, however, I think I mis-spoke; "SimPsychologist" might have been a better term. But then, I'm getting ahead of myself ….

On the surface, *Free Enterpri$e* is a game of entrepreneurship: choose a market and product, lease a building, and set up a factory. Then you can start your business running – a minimum continuous-time "turn" is a day, which you can watch in real time or in sped-up increments – monitoring everything from sales to employee stress. Depending on the settings you chose at the start of the game, you can even go into the profiles of your employees and change up to 40 characteristics.

Free Enterpri$e is really two games in one: the business sim and the psychological sim. To some extent, these "game modes" clash. If you ignore the psychological meddling in the game completely (or even turn it off at the start of a game session), you get a fairly straightforward business game, albeit one at a lower level of play than, say, *Capitalism*; you only control one business (although you can grow into larger facilities, and can produce multiple products). Setting up a factory floor seems like a neat idea, but once you get into the game you realize that this is really a minor portion of play.

The game really comes into its own when you start paying close attention to the employees themselves. There is some very complex modeling going on behind the scenes: employees can build up enmity (or fall in love), gripe, wish for higher pay, get stressed, etc. Unfortunately, "behind the scenes" is the operative term. If you play the game in real-time or just slightly faster, you might get to observe some basic interactions: employees talking, running to the bathroom, or even copping a smooch in a corner (although I never did see this), but there are problems here. First off, the business part of the game grinds to a halt (business events will still happen, just too slowly), and secondly, these activities just aren't detailed enough to watch for very long (*Sim Soap Opera* this is not). If you speed things up, the business aspect gets going, but the only *easy* way to note employee status is via a stress meter or, in extremes of stress, having an employee "go postal" on you by whipping out a chain gun and blowing co-workers away (but don't worry, this is just "representational"; everyone comes back to work the next day hale and hearty – and the shooter experiences an amazing drop in his or her stress level).

The *subtle* way to determine employee status is to note secondary results, and try to guess their causes; a machine isn't operating at peak efficiency, but why? Are we not getting any steel in because there's a shortage, or because our purchaser is not doing her job? While probably fascinating to those who relish such details, many strategy gamers might find this kind of gaming too vague to be fun.

There are several elements of *Free Enterpri$se* which reduce playability. First off, you'll really exercise your mouse hand with this game; there are lots of windows and dialogs to click and sort through. A side effect of this is that screen real estate gets chewed up awfully quickly, often obscuring the background animation of your work force. There is no built-in scenario of a larger factory, and the included scenarios seem more like saved games added to a menu than crafted situations. Even with "editable personalities" turned off, you should be able to access basic stats like employee's age; real bosses have at least this much insight into their workers. There is no auto-save; it's irritating to set the game to run for a year, only to come back and find it's crashed and you've lost whatever part of the year you'd accomplished. The manual, while fairly extensive, is somewhat disjointed and often repetitive; it seems like you get menu item descriptions several times over, but not enough real information on putting together a working business.

All of these design quibbles, however, are fixable. Educators and patient gamers should love it, and everyone should at least check out the demo; personally, I found the game interesting in the short term, but perhaps a

MissionForce: Cyberstorm

Sierra

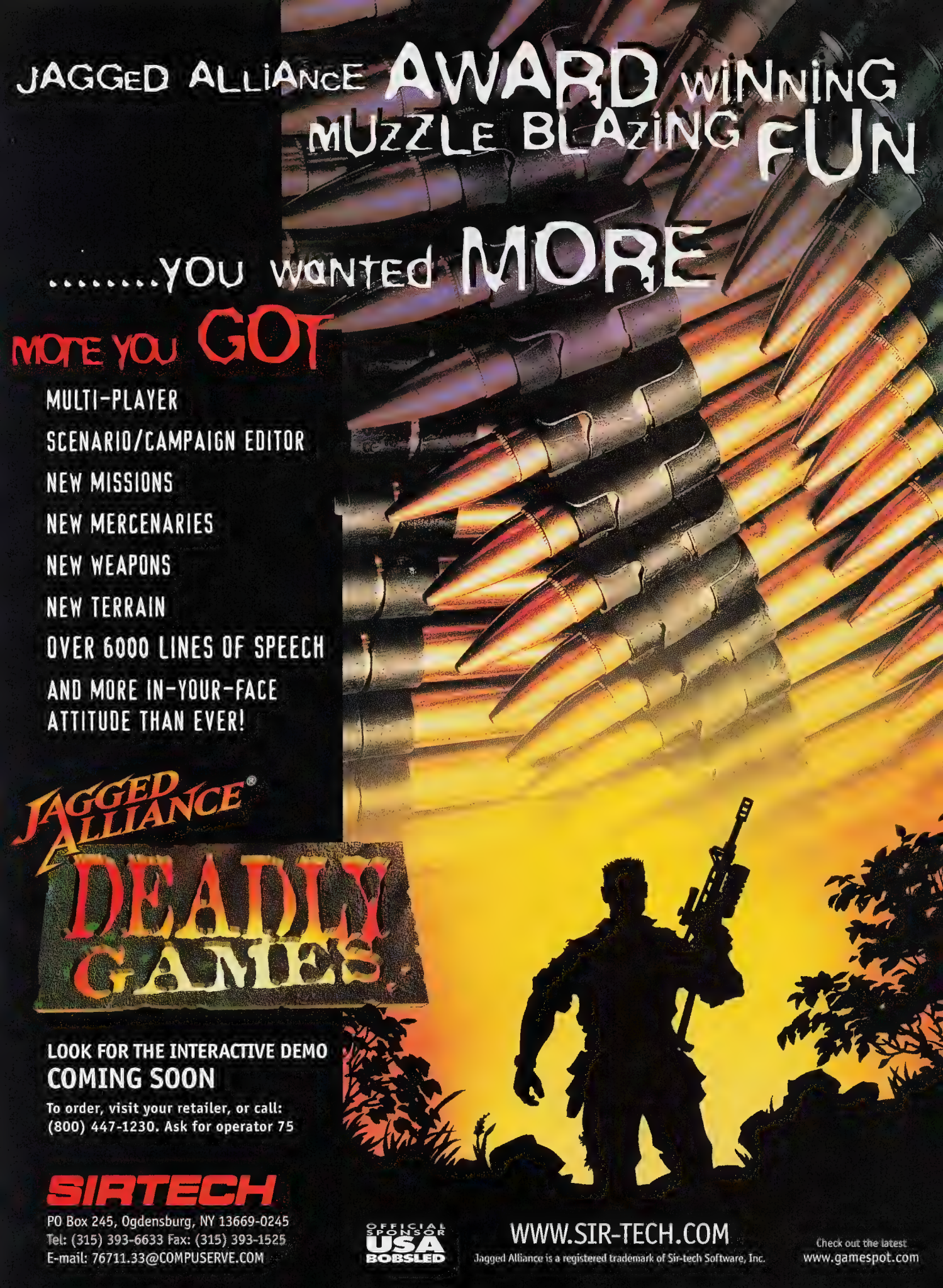
Windows 95

COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS STAMP OF APPROVAL

★★★★☆

Sierra's *MissionForce: Cyberstorm* takes place in the world of the *EarthSiege* games, but you won't need your joystick to command this batch 'o bots. This time out, strategy gamers get to play. Sierra has given us nice looking hex based maps, a squadron of hercs, and a premise which works well to meld the resource management aspects of the game with the pure strategy stuff. You play the part of a hired soldier, and must continually turn a profit or be ousted by the company you're working for.

Unlike the *EarthSiege* games, this one takes place far way from earth. Your mission is to chase those damned Cybrids out of three star systems while mining enough ore to stay solvent. You start with a small force and a selection of missions to choose from.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MissionForce: Cyberstorm

Deadline

Success earns bucks, which you'll spend on newer, better hercs or pilots (called bioderms). These bioderms are created in tanks just for the purpose of piloting hercs; each is rated according to pilot and weapon skills (which increase with experience).

This is the perfect game for mech…er, herc, lovers. You spend as much time tinkering with your 'bots as you do battling. There are a wide range of energy and ballistic weapons. Getting the perfect balance is part of the fun: energy-based weapons rip down shields, but practically bounce off armor. They use energy, which must also be used for movement and shields. Cannons and missiles can barely penetrate shields, but they use no energy to fire (although ammo supplies are limited). Lest you get stuck in a rut, some of the planets have atmospheres which prevent the use of certain types of weapons, forcing you to reconfigure your hercs.

In battle, the game is turn-based (for multiplayer action, you can place a time limit on each move). You can rotate the map or zoom it in and out. There is a Fog of War present. You won't know the terrain you're up against until you scout around to "push back the darkness." Units have facing, and shield strength can be distributed unevenly to protect specific sides. The interface is smooth and intuitive. The graphics are wonderful, with shields crackling with energy when hit, destroyed hercs crumbling to the ground and burning, and beams of energy crisscrossing the sky.

MissionForce: Cyberstorm is a ton of fun to play, but it isn't very deep. I don't mean that as a negative; not every strategy game has to be hard-core. You run your hercs around the maps, ducking into gullys and leaping up onto hills. Concentrate your fire on Cybrid hercs and watch 'em drop. The Cybrids have a numerical advantage, which is as it should be when you're the good guys fighting against pulp sci-fi evil.

I would have liked to have seen more detail in the combat. You target an enemy, but not a particular part of it. So no shooting off weapons for salvage, as with *EarthSiege*. I'm sure this was a conscious decision to keep gameplay clean, but still… Another criticism which has been prevalent on the nets is with play balance. In order to leave the first world, you have to take on a pretty formidable Cybrid base. Assuming you do that without losing any hercs, you'll arrive at the second planet with a force that is way overpowered for the missions at hand. Perhaps Sierra expected us to squeak by (as I did the first time I played) and thought we'd need some rebuilding time on world two. If this bothers you, crank up the difficulty level. If it still bothers you, well, leave some hercs behind or something.

Once again Sierra has left out the paper manual; all documentation is on the CD. They've offset this slight annoyance (it isn't a game which demands constant scanning of the rule book) by including a "buddy disk" for multiplayer gaming. This is a complete second copy of the game.

In all, *MissionForce: Cyberstorm* is a winner. Combat is fast and brutal, for that visceral satisfaction. You'll come to know and love (well…) your bioderms, and when one of your faves bites the dust, it hurts! The pace of building your forces is about right: you never have *quite* enough cash, so you'll have to make some tough decisions. Better weapons for your #1 bioderm, or better armor for the new kid? When you tire of the campaign, you can generate random missions, or play against your friends (modem, IPX and TCP/IP are supported). If you're a detail freak/totally hard-core strategy gamer with no time for light fare, *Cyberstorm* may not satisfy. But as a beer and pretzels game with that compelling "just one more mission" feel, it excels. *–Peter Smith*

Deadline

Vic Tokai

DOS

★★☆☆☆

Every once in a while a game reviewer's job gets really tough; you get a game with a great premise, even some good features, but a facet of the game brings the whole experience crashing down. *Deadline* is one of these games and, for me at least, it is a monstrously awkward interface that spoils what had the potential of being a very fun game.

The premise behind *Deadline* is simple: you've just taken charge of a combination SWAT/antiterrorist team, and it's up to you to lead your varied troops through 15 missions. Join different organizations (with distinct tactical challenges), select the members you need for your team, get briefed on the various situations, arm your team appropriately, plan their actions, and head out to get the bad guys and save the innocents, all before the deadline of the game's title is reached.

Each mission starts out with a slightly cheesy video briefing (these briefings can pop up at various times during your preparations). Based on the information from these briefings (and any leads you can gather from research), you have to jump through a variety of menus, selecting and arming team members. It's here, before you really being to "play," that the game really begins to break down. For example, you'd like to arm and equip members according to their skills, but to learn their skills you have to jump back to the personnel screen, note those skills down, then jump back to the equipment screen. You are given a chance to select your team before a mission occurs, but as you don't know what the mission is yet it's impossible to know (except *very* generally) what skills are needed.

The planning mode, perhaps the part of the game with the most potential, is also the game's worst feature. An overhead, blueprint-like view of the area of operations lets you plot out your team's moves ahead of time using diagrams similar to those used by football coaches. You place waypoints at which team members can be ordered to perform various actions. The problem is that I found no way to time these actions, nor is there a way to tell what action has been assigned to a team member's various nodes (and you can end up with dozens of these). The action buttons are vague (some of them aren't documented, or are documented incorrectly) and hard to use; all-in-all, this interface makes the one in *X-Com* seem like a paragon of interface design.

After planning (or, if you get to frustrated, without any planning) you can drop into a "live-view" mode similar in appearance to *X-Com*'s ¾ view and execute your plans. Your troopers will move through their actions, only deviating if you set their AI level to allow them to. You can also take over a trooper and control him or her directly, but this can be an exercise in frustration as you try to get them to maneuver about the screen, manipulate complex things like doors, or (heaven forbid) climb some stairs. Something that was great fun in a turn-based *X-Com* is poorly implemented in this real-time exercise in frustration.

It could be that there's a good little game in here (probably not great; other minor "rough edges" like the bad video, generic, single-sex voice over for your troops, and out-of-date graphics would prevent that in any case), but this gamer for one just couldn't fight through the interface to get there. *–Scott Udell*

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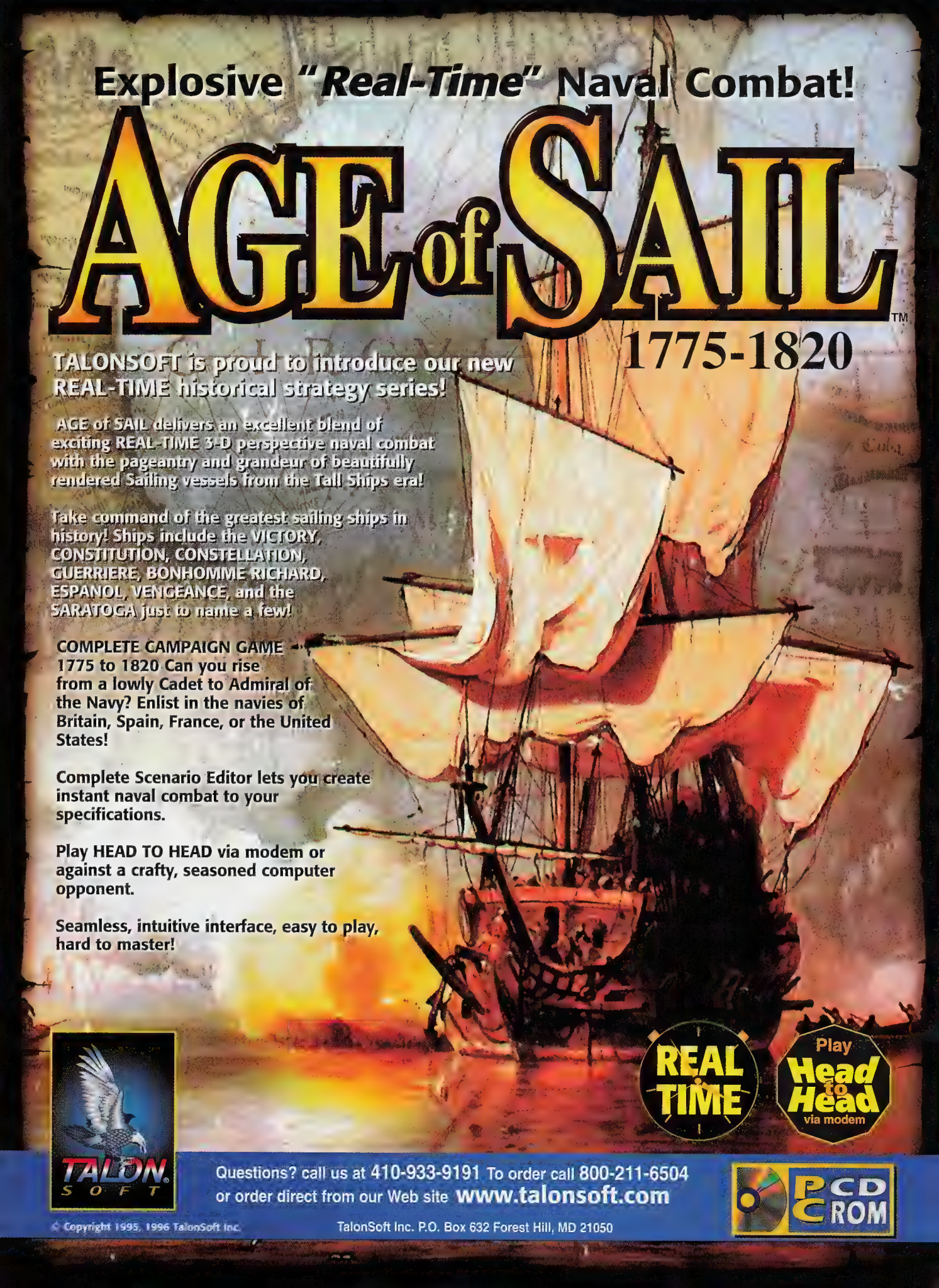
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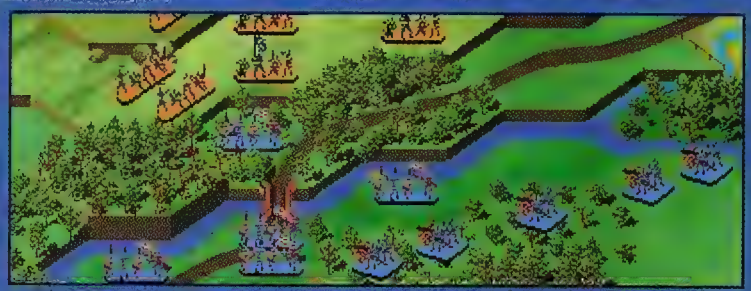

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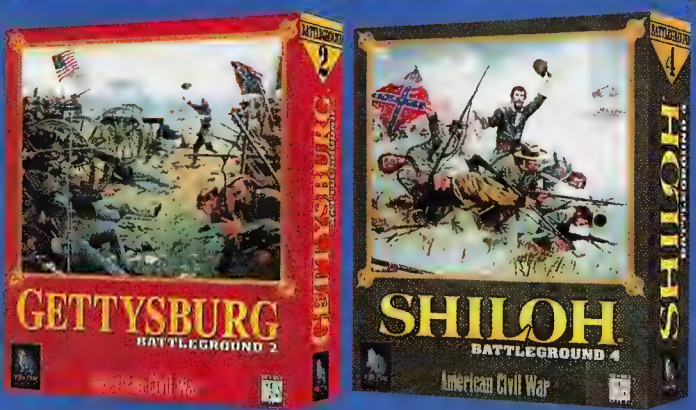

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Close Combat

Learning American tactics at Hedgerow High, St.-Lô

The Normandy campaign wasn't really something the Allied planners anticipated. The month spent in the hedgerows and marshes of the Norman countryside came about because German resistance was tougher than expected, and Allied progress correspondingly slower. The result was some 60,000 Allied casualties and a brutal initiation in the horrors of infantry warfare for many inexperienced soldiers. Microsoft's *Close Combat*, the brainchild of Keith Zabalaoui's Atomic Games, allows you to lead the men of the American 29th Infantry Division through this French hecatomb, or, alternately, to take the role of the experienced German *soldaten* in an attempt to at least delay the by now inevitable collapse of the "Thousand Year Reich." This month, we'll examine what it takes to do the former: lead the Americans to St.-Lô in 43 days or less.

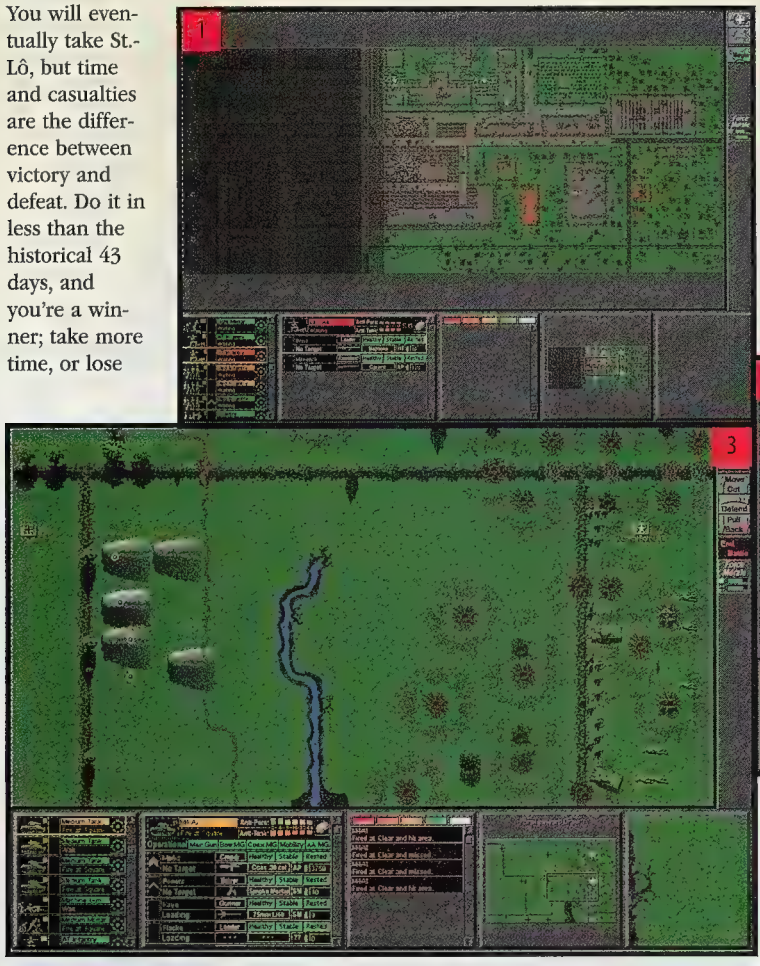
To win the campaign as the Americans, you have to understand what it is you are trying to do. You will eventually take St.-Lô, but time and casualties are the difference between victory and defeat. Do it in less than the historical 43 days, and you're a winner; take more time, or lose too many men, and it's back to basic training. You accelerate your advance by winning battles, and get delayed when you lose. The better you do, the more battles you skip ahead; winning big moves your timetable up considerably, but losing slows you down so you have to fight again over familiar terrain. Casualties hurt in several ways; the more replacements you have to take, the more time you'll lose, and too many letters home will hurt your performance rating. The essence of victory, then, is winning fast and efficiently.

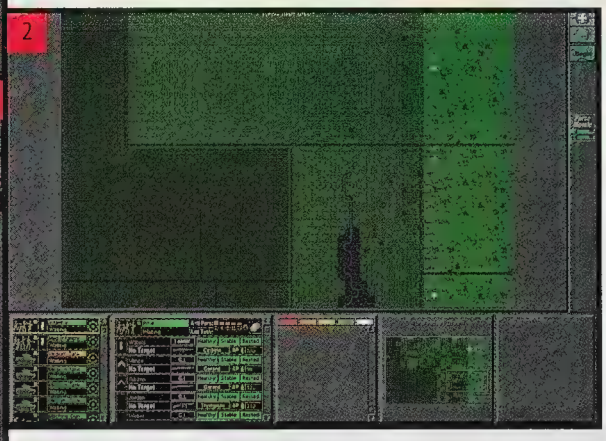
Win fast and efficiently

Speed and efficiency aren't easy, however. This is first and foremost a command game, not a counter pushing exercise. You take the role of the on-map commander, and it's up to you to lead your men. A foolish order often results in one of two things: your men ignore it, or worse, they follow it and die. Not surprisingly, many of your soldiers are in no hurry to find out if there really is life after death , and while heroism isn't uncommon, you can't depend on a platoon from Sgt. Rock's Easy Company to bail you out of sticky situations. Speed usually means taking risks, and that doesn't help your efficiency, yet efficiency (in terms of lives) usually means taking it slow and easy, and that doesn't help your speed. While there isn't really a time limit in the individual battles, if you move too slowly you're likely to wind up with less of a victory than you hoped for, as the computer will decide that one or both sides is exhausted after a certain amount of strenuous (and bloody) activity. The upshot of all this is that you need to prosecute your attacks rapidly and use all of your forces to the utmost, while keeping casualties down.

Setting up the assault

The way to start a battle is by re-deploying your forces to locations supporting your own plan of attack. You should focus on killing the enemy, and forcing a withdrawal, not on merely capturing victory point locations. Many of the VP spots will be smack in the middle of killing grounds, so a headlong rush to glory will soon become the fast track to a white cross and a telegram to Ma and Pa in Peoria. On the other hand, if you force Hitler's legions to goose-step in the opposite direction, you'll take all those VP locations *gratis* when the Germans pull back. The terrain you should be interested in is that which either shields you from enemy fire or allows you to fire more effectively on the enemy. Command this sort of ground, and the other locations will follow. Holding the hedgerow line or stone house that commands a VP spot 100 meters away is often far better than bull





[1] Those depleted teams will become a constant reminder to be careful

[2] Try overloading one flank; that open northern expanse is a killing field

[3] Smoke 'em if ya got 'em, dogfaces!

Get Uncivilized!

The Settlers II is a unique new kind of economic simulation. Watch as thousands of your "subjects" perform their designated tasks – erecting buildings, building ships, transporting goods, battling enemies and more – in real time...at your command...right before your eyes!

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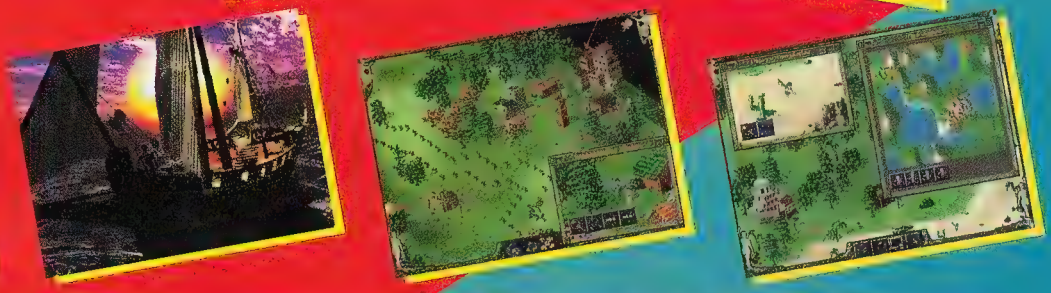
"All in all, Settlers II looks like a substantial improvement on an already excellent gaming system."
Strategy Plus, June '96

"A must for fans of the original and gamers who like God sims."
PC Power, April '96



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[1] Heavy infantry with satchel charges are cool, but you don't always get them

[2] Smoke can help shield your Shermans from the 88 in the bunker

rushing the objective itself.

When setting up, anticipate where the Germans will be. Your foes like to line up behind hedgerows, or snipe from farm houses. Position your forces to put maximum firepower on those locations. This doesn't necessarily mean clumping your men together; that isn't too smart, what with German assault guns roaming the fields in front of you and 8cm mortars raining good Ruhr steel on your pointed little heads. Keep in mind that the map in *Close Combat* is very small in real world measurements. If you have a line of sight to it, you can hit it. You should have a base of heavy firepower, machine guns, BARs, or armor, to support every advance. Even your rifle teams, with their semi-auto Garands, can lay down some awesome fire, so position your supporting forces so that their fire converges, but their physical locations diverge. When you finally assault a position, you can bring your teams together as they cross no-man's land, coming to a sharp and concentrated point at the objective.

Of course, assaults are dicey. The best way to take a hedgerow or house is to blast the occupants before you close with them. Barring that, use smoke to cover your advance, supported by heavy suppressive fire. A good rule of thumb is to use three teams for an assault. One large team can advance under smoke, while two others provide fire support. Try using machine gun fire from the flanks as well. Mortars are fine for disrupting and suppressing defenders behind walls and hedgerows, but aren't too useful for dislodging Germans from buildings and bunkers. They are great, however, for laying down smoke screens; just keep an eye on your ammo count. Direct fire artillery, in the form of anti-tank guns, can be effective in blasting dug-in Germans, but should do so from a safe distance (keep this in mind when you deploy). Recon teams have good close in firepower with their SMGs, but little range; use them to scout, and to ambush Germans at close range. Recon teams are usually too small for assaults.

And of course, there are tanks. Tanks and tank destroyers are your mobile artillery. Unfortunately, the Germans come equipped with lots of anti-armor weapons, which can kill your vehicles from a distance. This is particularly true with your ubiquitous M3 half-tracks, which are really little more than armored machine guns. Don't succumb to the temptation to rush your armor up to the hedgerows and blast away at point-blank range; a Panzerfaust will ruin your day, for sure. Instead, sit your armor back a bit, behind cover, and lob HE and MG fire at your enemies. In an advance, scout with infantry first, to locate AT positions and enemy armor. Then, maneuver your own AT teams and your tanks to knock out German vehicles, and use your mortars to suppress AT guns. Tanks are too valuable to waste. They are often the difference between dislodging a pesky MG 42 team and routing from battle. You have to balance caution and aggression here; you need that fire support, but losing a tank hurts morale, and often leaves you with too little firepower to do the job.

Executing the assault

So, how do you get to grips with Fritz? Use the hedgerows and buildings for cover, and don't march up the roads. Nothing ruins your day like an assault gun decimating your teams from 150 meters away as they stroll down a country lane. Save infantry smoke for the final assault, where you'll need to cross those last few meters of open ground. Use mortar and vehicle smoke to cover strategic moves. Many battles will see you facing the Germans over a hedged field, with both sides lined up in the hedgerows on opposite sides. Your superior rifle firepower can often force the Germans to move away, but you will face more machine gun fire than you dreamed possible, so use mortars and artillery if you have it to even the odds. Once the Reich Rats begin to flee, you can pop smoke and advance in bounds. If possible, out flank the entire enemy position by using the north or south map edge as cover..

Keep moving forward, even if only slowly. Once you falter, convincing your troops to move again gets tough. VP spots are good to get, in case the battle ends with both of you exhausted, but killing Germans is the way to win. The Germans will withdraw if you hurt them too much, as they can't sustain the kind of casualties you can. If you walk into a killing zone, try to move laterally to cover, and regroup and try again. Don't brazen it out with inferior firepower, but return from a different angle with more muscle. You can't win by out-finessing the Germans, you have to out-muscle them, so don't be afraid to use excessive force; all of France is a free fire zone, and you've got the Ronson to make it burn. ■

IN THE FUTURE, THE SPORTS PAGE HAS AN OBITUARY SECTION

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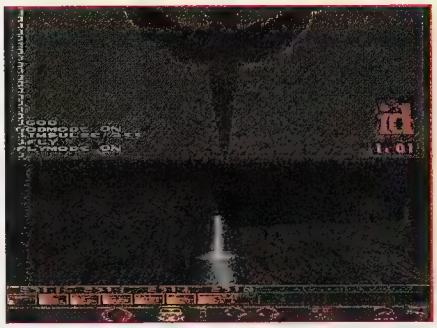
by Steve Bauman

Cheater

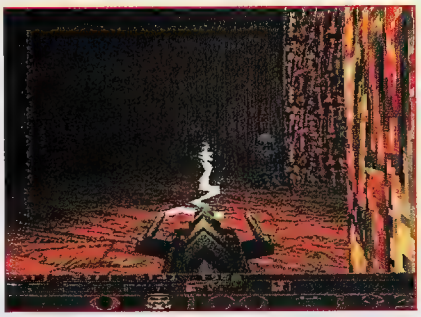
Why do we cheat at games?

Hmm, *Quake* just came out (turn the page for a review of the final version). It's superb. Ho-hum. All those people bashing it for the past few months (wasn't me. Nope, no one saw me do it…) should just admit that it's the best 3D game in the world right now. It's not perfect, but every game will look like it a year from now. But anyway, this month's topic is straight from the department of irrelevancy…

Why is it that the day a game's released, the first online message isn't a message like "Wow, I just got *Intestinal Fortitude* and it rocks, with 30 levels of gut-busting fun." Instead, the first message posted will invariably be "Hey, does anyone know any codes for *Car Crash 3D*?"



It all starts here



You know you want this weapon. It's just a console command away

Who needs to hold their breath? It's just a GOD statement away…

Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with using codes to get beyond a certain spot in a game. We do buy these things for enjoyment, not to be frustrated and annoyed. Reviewers use them all the time, because deadlines being what they are, getting stuck could mean an empty page in the magazine. However, much like adventure gamers don't like online hints, they become a crutch, and their mere existence can cause you to take the low road out of a tough situation.

But why are they even there in the first place? Originally, companies would put codes in early versions of a product in order to test them. They would allow testers to jump to certain levels easily, and then test various combinations of items. It also makes it easier to demo a game when you're not dying every five minutes (the "Marketing Menu"). They're still used for this purpose, but often they're never removed from the final product.

It's probably time to blame id (again – it's always their fault) for their popularity (though they were far from being the first). How many of your automatically type IDDQD or IDKFA when you start your newest action game? Before *Doom's* IDCLIP command, how many of you actually knew what clipping was, or that not having it could get you out of a tough situation? On a positive note, let's be thankful that the PC has a keyboard, so we don't have try to enter the codes like the consoles do ("OK, at the main menu, press the A button 37 times while swirling the joypad 14 times clockwise, and 11 counterclockwise, all the while humming Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" in waltz time).

Westwood Studios, bless their hearts, actually took heat for *not* including cheat codes in *Command & Conquer*. But they're in the minority. There will always be cheat codes, because companies like to see online discussions about their games. Since that first message, "Hey, anyone got some cheat codes," generates a ton of "Can you send them to me, too," it makes it look like there's a buzz about that game. The upside of all of this discussion is that maybe, just maybe, a single intelligent discussion of the *game* may pop-up. Maybe people will give hints to problems and not just say "Cheat your way past it."

More importantly, cheating will always exist because cheating's fun. There's nothing wrong with it. Just don't complain when you've ruined your gaming experience. ■

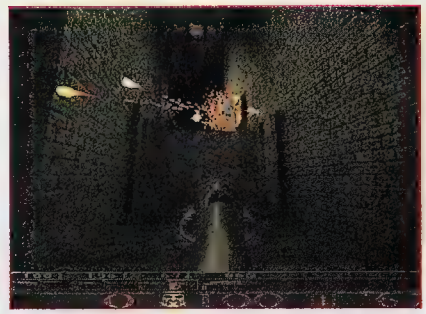
Help with the Hulk

In *Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels*, type I NEED HELP at the double-doors at the very beginning of the game (unverified, so no letters if it doesn't work).

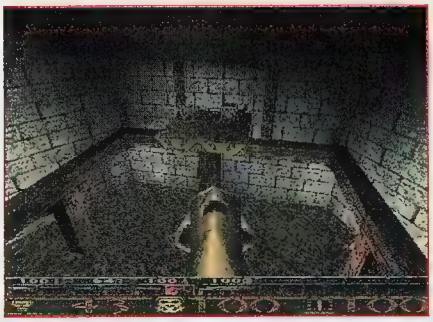
More Quake codes

Press [~] to bring up the console. At the prompt, type:

GOD	Invincible
MAP E#M#	Go to the map in Episode #, Map #
GIVE #	Gives weapon #
GIVE S#	Gives you # shells
GIVE N#	Gives you # nails
GIVE C#	Gives you # cells
GIVE R#	Gives you # rockets
GIVE H#	Gives you # health
NOTARGET	Enemies don't attack until attacked
IMPULSE 255	Quad damage
NOCLIP	Walk through walls
FLY	<C> down, <D> up
KILL	Commit suicide



Fire rockets without worrying about your proximity to the blast



Here's a quandary. Figure out the proper way over, which could take hours, or just FLY over?

Gender bashing

To enter god-mode in *Gender Wars*, go to the saved-game menu and type in BUY A PLAYSTATION as your saved-game name. You will have unlimited shields and ammo.

Psychologists say inside every
18 to 35-year-old male, there lies
a potential psychotic killer.

Pure evil, pure brilliance

Quake

id Software

DOS

★★★★★

Satan, your game has arrived. It spits up blood and pisses vinegar. It sprouts horns from its head like the proud minion of evil that it is. It shoots lightning bolts, for cripes sake. It's a game of pure evil. And even purer entertainment. It's also the best action game on the planet.

It's *Quake*, the biggest and baddest game of the year, the latest from id Software. Cutting through the hyperbole, the final version proves that those who dismissed *Quake* after playing the shareware version (and you wouldn't be alone) were wrong. Very wrong.

That may be an overstatement, because it's hard to say if you'll be happy with the final version. We (myself included) were all quick to judge the shareware version, quick to point out that the levels were too small, that they were near-monochrome in their color selection and that the environment lacked the interactivity of *Duke Nukem 3D*.

Let the *Duke* fans shoot toilets to their hearts' content. The environments of *Quake* are intense, not cartoony. Though you could make a perfectly valid argument that beige is not the most endearing color (you will find levels which actually feature the color blue – and they're breathtaking), the overall design of the levels is incredible; later levels seem to be a bit less showy than those in the shareware release. That version suffered from a bit of the "well, we can do all of these cool things in 3D, so let's do them" school of thought. The later levels reveal more confidence and cleverness in their designs, with simpler puzzles (very simple – press button A to open B). These levels also appear to be more heavily populated by nastier creatures – many of which are placed in sniper-like locations, meaning the player has to look around a lot (while getting bombed to hell).

The CD-audio soundtrack is perfect. Created by the poster-boy for family values (well, Manson family values, at least), Trent Reznor of nine inch nails, it varies from full-on industrial style aural assaults to subtle orchestral pieces. Of course, those same subtle bits usually have some backward-masked vocals on them, thereby turning up the creep quotient. Despite id's insistence that most players prefer to play without music (I always liked *Doom*'s music), no one's likely to turn this soundtrack off. Too bad it's not keyed in to the action – it apparently just cycles through random tracks (which is good if you prefer the strains of Beethoven or Beefheart).

Clockwise from top left: Be afraid of this guy. Very afraid; The graphic carnage is quite, uh, graphic; Watch out for CGSPLUS on Quake servers around the world; Spider-boy here likes to lob grenades at ya. Return the favor; Don't spend too much time admiring the pretty scenery. There's killin' to be done

The sound effects, also created by Reznor, are equally superb. There are the requisite shotgun and explosion sounds, but it's the weird ones, like the nifty nailgun sound when it hits the wall, or the screams and moans, which really set this apart. Best of all is the thoroughly repulsive sound the zombies make – it's a disgusting "thwak" sound, heard when they lob pieces of their own flesh at you. Very cool.

Also cool is multiplayer play. *Quake* was designed from the ground up as a client/server network game. Its main claim to fame – and something which may provide a glimpse into the future of online gaming – is the ability for players to jump in and out of games at will. The next step will be linking server to server, allowing you to jump from one map with one group of people to another. That's on the way.

Joining a *Quake* Deathmatch server on the Internet is mind-numbingly simple (and mind-boggingly exciting – though speed is currently a problem with 16 players at a time). If you have Dial-Up Networking enabled under Windows 95, launch "Q95.BAT," go into "Multiplayer" and select "TCP/IP." Select "Join Game," noting that you can customize your own machine under "Setup." Under "Connect to" enter the IP address 199.171.27.87 (this is GT Interactive's *Quake* server). Better yet, go to Yahoo and search for "Quake server" and you'll find places listing up-to-date *Quake* servers, running 24 hours a day (and you'll usually find 16 people to kill.

The only thing which keeps *Quake* from achieving total godhood (or would that be devilhood?) is that it takes no chances. The design of the game doesn't tinker at all with the standard formula set by *Wolfenstein 3D*. Shoot things. Collect weapons. Find keys. Open doors with keys. The weapons aren't spectacular, and multiplayer would be a lot better with a few *Duke Nukem 3D*-style defensive weapons, like pipe bombs and trip wires. Multiplayer play too often degenerates into "who can find the rocket launcher first," rather than showing off player skill or strategy.

There were many of us who were dismissing the alpha and shareware versions as an enormous disappointment. If you were expecting something that immediately

CAN HE

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RATING PENDING RP

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For PC CD-ROM.

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18 to ...

a potential psychotic killer.

grabbed you the same way *Doom* did back in 92, you were bound to be disappointed. But after spending hour upon hour in both solo and multiplayer mode, it's become clear that *Quake* is, in fact, a spectacular piece of work.

Will it have the same impact *Doom* had? Nope: its impact will be greater, influencing every future online and multiplayer game. With lord knows how many *Quake* servers spawning across the globe, all linked in a web of death and mayhem, this game should stay in the public's eye for years to come. – *Steve Bauman*

Clockwise from above:
Fire Fight: Buffy and Jody gang up on our hero; Here's Grand Central – Cajun style
Gender Wars: Looks awesome, but gameplay isn't quite there

Fire Fight

Electronic Arts

Windows 95

★★★★☆

Straight from Poland comes an obscure but amazing title called *Fire Fight*. While perusing the local software shops, there under a bin of Microsoft *Bob* lay a *Fire Fight* box, neatly stacked underneath. Feeling its pain, I lifted the copy up into the safety of my arms. On initial glance, the prevailing thought was, "Hmm. Dumb looking box. Exponentially over-clichéd name. Screen shots from the introduction plastered on the box. Looks like another weasel in the hen house."

Bzzzzt! Wrong! From the first mission to the last, this game quickly became a candidate for the sleeper action hit of the first half of 1996. Five hours into the game, and there *still* wasn't a soft drink's chance in Guyana of wresting it away from these dazzled pupils.

As the game unfolds, a simple storyline dictates a unibody of world leaders using you for their weapon to secure "Peace at any Price." This peace, of course, can only come at the obliteration of everything within your visage. Ironic, yet somehow subtly fulfilling.

Those screen shots previously thought to be from the intro? Naaawww. Those back-of-the-box cameo critters were live action shots from the game. The game world is gorgeously rendered in an isometric viewpoint in the fashion of *Crusader: No Remorse* and *Total Mayhem*. In the same mindset as your average three year old, the world is yours to demolish. There are 18 separate missions, with surreal backdrops ranging from eerie jungle ventures into icy wastelands, and even a world of thick menacing brambles surrounding your field of play.

One of the wow factors is the multi-level scrolling of the background. It's an awe-striking experience moving through the game world, while watching gaping holes underneath the top layer of terrain expose a cosmetically different yet joined view scrolling at a different rate.

Finally, the ships are designed in flawless detail, and each of the six weapon types is displayed as itself on your ship. The kicker here is that you have independent control of your ship to your weapon. You can use the keyboard to move your vessel in all four directions (and side to side) and the mouse to rotate whatever weapon is perched on your ship toward any target's direction. Imagine, if you will, flying by a missile tower while strafing it with your Vulcan cannon during the entire run. All because you can travel one direction while shooting in any other direction. Simply put, the freedom of control in *Fire Fight* is unparalleled.

Mission styles range from "shoot everything in sight," to "shoot everything in sight in the name of justice," to "shoot everything in sight after you've rescued hostages," and of course "shoot everything in sight under the warm, fuzzy banner of peace." Yup, my kind of game.

As yet another entry in the long exodus of recent titles written for Windows 95 and DirectDraw, *Fire Fight* further enforces the belief that the page is finally turning on stable gaming under Windows 95. Installation is a snap, and the network set-up is pain free.

If there is anything to complain about, it would have to be the multi-player portion of the game. After playing it several hours, there was a glaring need for an option to turn off the radar, as it exposes you and your opponents to each other. While a treasured friend in the lone missions, the radar was a curse in multi-player as you have no opportunity for ambush, hit-and-run tactics, or any strategy other than face-to-face combat. Nonetheless, taking on comrades is an invigorating experience. Having four players scurrying around finding bricks to build their bases while not getting blasted into fat-free fodder flakes is a harried and tense experience.

Ultimately, *Fire Fight* will annoy anyone with a penchant for symphonies and Lily pads. Its gritty soundtrack, brash arrogant characters, darkly surreal graphics, and blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life is a sure sign of brilliance. In three words, "It's an H.I.T!"

There just aren't enough accolades around to shower on the designers of *Fire Fight* for their refreshing creation of a classic action game. It's a title that will spend the rest of its years cuddling next to *Stunts* and *Raptor* on the hard drive. – *Tim Royal*

Gender Wars

SCi

DOS

★★½☆☆

How does this sound? Create a game with the visual detail and carnage of Origin's *Crusader: No Remorse* and combine it with the controls and gameplay (not to mention the same static isometric view) of Bullfrog's *Syndicate*. Top it off with the potentially controversial premise that finds men and women pitted against one another in violent battle and you have the making of a seriously cool game.

And that's exactly what you may think if you watch someone playing SCi's *Gender Wars*, the game where boys and girls decide to make war, not love. If you sit over the shoulder of someone playing this game, you may think it's seriously hot, and with it beating *Syndicate Wars* by a few months it may satisfy your craving for an action-strategy game (with the emphasis on action).

Hold that thought. Games like *Crusader* and *Syndicate* are beloved because, in addition to those stunning visuals and red-hot gameplay, they managed to get all of the details right. Details are what separate an average title from a blockbuster, and the lack of attention to detail is what keeps *Gender Wars* from succeeding.

The problems with the game are all gameplay related. The game is mission-based, with primary and secondary objectives delivered to the player before entering the mission. Unfortunately, the missions, in particular the early ones, are too long and

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From left:
Gender Wars: The graphic detail is astonishing;
Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can O' Worms:
In the future, everyone will have their own television show; Final Doom: It's about time

too few in number. You have 12 on each side, and they drag on and on (without a mid-mission saved game), spanning many locations. A better decision would have been shorter, training-style missions building up to the larger, full-scale assaults that the player faces right from the beginning of the game.

Other problems include the always problematic opponent AI. It's really stupid in this game. For example, you can walk into many locations, spot the enemy, and blow up everything in the room. The enemy will not attack. Take a step forward, hit the magic square the program has determined when they see you (never mind that you're standing in a doorway with no cover), and they'll charge. Your troops aren't much better. They're supposed to follow the leader, and you can give them group assignments (like "fire at will"), but they will usually get lost on every level, as they can't figure out how to operate most of the elevators which connect locations in the game.

Worse yet are the details of the interface. While of the simple point and click variety (click to go to a location, right-mouse fires, etc.), there are certain repetitive aspects that get to be quite annoying. On the various missions, there are buttons and objects the player must interact with. This is fairly standard, but in order to do this you must be in the floor area exactly one square next to the object. A better design would have followed adventure game protocol and allowed the player to click on the object, after which the characters would then walk over and manipulate it. This detail may sound trivial, but during the heat of battle, or even during the lulls, the fun of the game is not trying to navigate to that single square the computer determines is close enough to the object for you to manipulate the object. No, the fun is blowing everything up. And you can almost blow up every item in this game. Rarely will you see this much highly detailed carnage.

Finally, network play didn't make it into the final release, and with the single-player game emerging as a disappointment, that could have been its saving grace.

As it stands, *Gender Wars* is visually stunning, but lacks playability and polish. It's not the sort of game that the player will want to load up for one more game. Once you're over the visual allure, the rest of the game isn't that pretty. – *S.B.*

Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can O' Worms

Playmates

DOS

★★★½☆

For the price of one game you can get two, count 'em, two games. For those who aren't familiar with Jim, he's a worm. He runs. He jumps. He carries cows. He's the slimiest superhero around.

Even though these games are really unessential (especially if you're at all familiar with their console versions), there's something about the superb gameplay Shiny Entertainment manages to coax out of the tired platform genre which makes these such engaging games. Part of it is the marvelous character design – Jim, and the various denizens of the environments, are incredibly well animated, both literally and figuratively. The other half is the constantly evolving gameplay, which goes from traditional side-scroller to pseudo-3D shooter, to *Zaxxon*-style flying, to puppy juggling (don't ask). Get wormed today. – *S.B.*

Final Doom

id Software

DOS, Windows 95

★★★☆☆

Finally. It's the end of *Doom*. And with *Quake* finally here, it couldn't have come at a better time. *Final Doom* is a collection of two 32 level episodes that are more sadistic and difficult than anything id has previously dumped upon the market. They're not for wimps or novices; they've moved somewhere beyond difficult with these things. They're too difficult, in fact, and there are probably only a handful of eight year olds who can actually finish them (but they're probably the only people who are actually interested in more *Doom* levels).

The only real change in the game engine is the new Windows 95 launcher. It allows players to access all of the things that were previously only available to those players who'd mastered the command-line interface of *Doom* easily (erm, the "command-line interface of *Doom*" – sorta describes DOS, eh?). It allows you to jump to any level, set the difficulty levels, set screen resolutions and redefine the interface. Because it's a native Windows 95 application, there's no sound card setup, and you can play in multiple screen resolutions.

When you go back to playing *Doom*, after spending a lot of time with *Duke Nukem 3D* or *Quake*, you're initially put off by its primitive environments and visuals. You can't duck, jump or look up and down. But once that music and those creepy sound effects start oozing out your speakers, you quickly realize that you're still in for what has always been the most visceral experience to date on the PC. Yeah, both of those other 3D games are more sophisticated, but *Doom* is the original – and the best – at simulating dread. When you walk into a dark hallway, turn the corner and stand face-to-face with demonspawn, it's much more effective than walking through a strip bar while being attacked by a pig in an LAPD uniform.

Face it. *Doom* still has style. *Final Doom* is too hard to be that enjoyable, but all of those little sadists still worshipping at the altar of id will be more than happy to spend a bit more time in hell. – *S.B.*

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CD-ROM

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KIDS TO ADULTS
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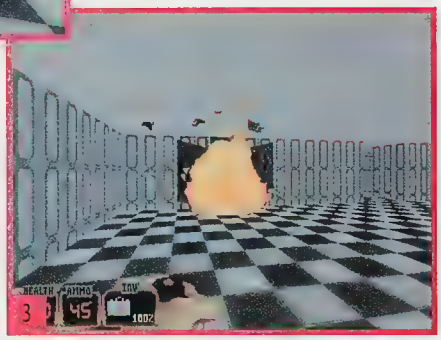
Duke Nukem 3D

Build Part II: Special effects

In the second part of the Build Tutorial, we're simply going to go over some of the other, more complicated special effects that Duke*'s Build engine can do. These are some thing that can really help spice up your level.*

[1] Swing doors can be very problematic. Remember that when making double doors, in order for them to both swing inward (or outward) one door has to swing clockwise and the other counterclockwise
[2] For nice added touch, bring the door down from the ceiling instead of up from the floor so you have that everpresent gap. The big question, of course, is do ladies rooms suffer from this oddity of man as well?
[3] C-9 explosives-fun, easy, and able to get those creative juices flowing in a manner most destructive

Swing Doors: Swing doors have some peculiar features, and are extremely uppity, as far as doors go. First off, the actual door(s) is a sector all to its own. Secondly, Swing doors are very particular as to how and where you place them. For simplicity's sake, let's say we are making a swing door for a bathroom stall. Make the stall (and probably the whole bathroom as well) and pay close attention to where the door is going to go, and the size. Generally, the actual door should be just long enough to cover the opening you want to place it over. Now move to a bare spot in the room sector and draw your door sector there, again making sure that it is exactly the right size (though you can easily alter its size at will). Next, use Alt-S to make the door sector a valid sector (it will turn red), and give it a lotag of 23. Now – and this is the important part – you cannot place the swing door inside the stall sector (or any door jam sector). It must go on a wall which prevents its pivot side from touching anything. Either the top or bottom wall (as in the front or back of the door) must be overlapped with the red line of the sector it's blocking up. So, the door will be sticking out a bit from the red line where you would enter the stall from the bathroom. Now, use the zoom command (the A/Z keys) to get in close to where the pivot point should go. Assuming the stall is at the "top" of the screen and the door is going on its "bottom," the pivot point would be on the door's upper left corner. Use the G key to turn the Grid off completely, and place a sprite as close to the corner point as possible without actually connecting it with the point. Give the sprite a Lotag of 11 and a unique Hitag. If you are making double doors, make sure they both use the same hitag – that's how the game knows to swing them together. To make the door swing clockwise, the sprite's tail should be pointing up; for counterclockwise, point the tail down. Go to 3D mode and make sure the Sprite is a Sector Effector Sprite (the "S" sprite, it's sprite#1). Now, raise your stall door up from the ground, or down from the ceiling if you want a floor gap (it is a bathroom stall, after all). If the door is acting funny (say it disappears when viewed from certain angles), you can usually correct the problem by tightening the pivot point sprite's position (getting it closer to the corner point, or the corner point and the side wall – you'll probably have to play around with it to get it just right). Also, make sure the door has enough room to open.



Earthquakes: Earthquakes are set off when the player walks over a *touchplate* (sprite #3, the "T"); therefore, the touchplate is the trigger. The touchplate activates a *masterswitch* (sprite #8, the "D"). The masterswitch in conjunction sets off the sector effector sprite that is paired with it in each sector that is to be affected by the earthquake. Give the touchplate and all masterswitches in the earthquake the same unique lotag. Give all S.E. sprites a lotag of 2. Note that you have to manually make each portion of the earthquake that you want to move – each is a sector, and each needs to have the masterswitch/S.E. pair in them. Each sector will move in the direction the S.E. sprite is point-

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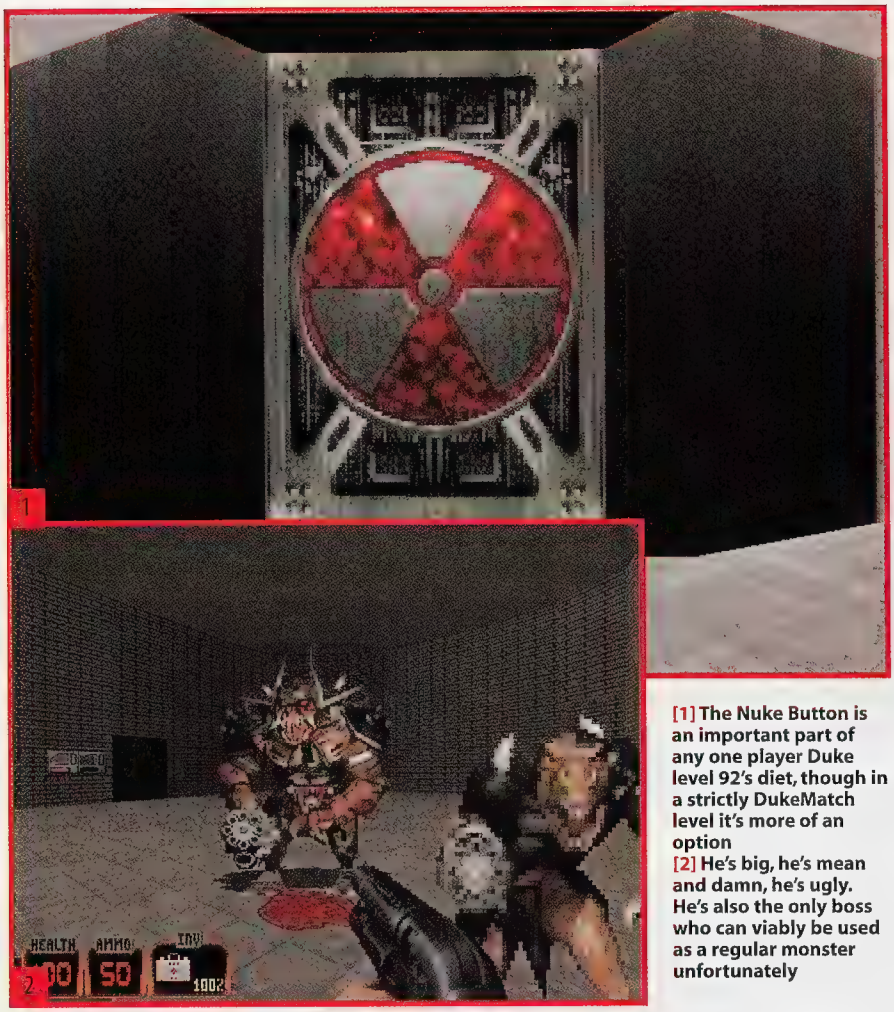
ing. If you want the sectors to be sloped and/or jutted, you have to do so beforehand (these areas will be flat in the actual game, then raise (or lower) when the earthquake is triggered). To have debris (or "Jibs," as the game calls it) fly up during the earthquake, place S.E. sprites with a lotag of 33 where ever you want jibs to spawn.

Vents: Vents are very similar to windows, except vents are actually sprites. First make your vent shaft, then place a sprite where you want the vent to go. Choose the vent tile for the sprite (#595), use the Page Up and Page Down keys to put it right over the vent shaft hole, and press the R key to make it stick to the wall. In 2D mode, make the vent sprite Blockable and hittable (by pressing B and Ctrl-H with the sprite highlighted, it should turn a thick blue). Be sure to use the numeric pad's 4,6+2,8 keys to make the vent tile look properly proportioned from both the inside of the shaft and the outside.

Nuke Buttons: Nuke buttons are one of two ways to end a level. Place the sprite where you want it, then choose graphic #142 to get to the Nukebutton graphic. After choosing the Nukebutton, go into 2D mode and give the button a lotag of 32767, then press Ctrl-H to make it hittable (do not make it Blockable, only hittable, or else it won't work right if at all). Another way to end a level is to give a sector a lotag of 65535, which will make the level end when the player steps on that sector.

Wall Cracks: Wall Cracks are a combination of C-9 canisters (#1247), wall cracks (#546-549), sector effector sprites, and creative use of sectors. Generally, you'll want to make several sectors in a row, so you can slope and jut them to give them that crazy, blown-up look (and use texture #796 – the charred black wall). From 2D mode, you'll need to place two different sprites in each of the sectors you want blown away – one will be the C9 explosive canister, and the other a S.E. sprite. You will also need a wall crack that will go over the place where the wall will be during the game (and is currently a gaping hole). Give the crack a unique hitag, which you will use for all the sector effector sprites as well (thus enabling you to have a nice, long chain of explosions from a single crack if you want). Give the S.E. sprites a lotag of 13. In 3D mode, you can use the 4 and 5 keys on the numeric keypad to make the C9 canisters thinner, so that they become bare sticks; at minimum width, they're invisible in the actual game. The lotag for the C9 determines how long until it blows; numbers under 100 are very short times. Giving each C9 a different time can create sequential chains of fire. You can replace the crack with an explosive canister (don't put the canister on or in the wall, though). The texture in the front of the explosive sectors (as in what you'll see when looking at the hole from the main room) designates what the wall texture will be when the wall is whole in the game. Make sure the wall sides of the ceiling and floor are a little bit visible; the walls don't always match up, and need to be tweaked. Sometimes, this problem is simply because the ceiling is up too high, or the floor down too low.



[1] The Nuke Button is an important part of any one player Duke level 92's diet, though in a strictly DukeMatch level it's more of an option
[2] He's big, he's mean and damn, he's ugly. He's also the only boss who can viably be used as a regular monster unfortunately

Conveyors/Currents: Make the sector that will be the conveyor, get it to be the way you want it and place an S.E. sprite in it. Give the sprite a lotag of 24 and point the sprite in the direction you want the conveyor to go. If it's a water current, give the sector a lotag of 1 and use the water texture; everything else is the same. To make it faster, place a Speed sprite (#10) in the sector. The higher the lotag you give it, the faster the speed. You can use the speed sprite for doors and many other things as well.

Monsters/Bosses: Monsters are only placed properly when you use the right pose (or frame) of the monster. Usually, the first frame and the beginning of each new frame series is always useable . The easiest way to tell for most of the monsters is that they move in place when you set them on the map (not the hovering monsters, though), and are three-dimensional looking. To use a boss as a monster, press Alt-P while over it in 3D mode to change its palette and give it a palette number other than zero. Note however, that the game only seems to allow the first boss to be completely useable; the other two just seem to kill themselves as soon as you look at them. There may be a way around this.

Light Switches: Requires two sprites: the actual switch (use anyone you like) and an S.E. sprite placed in each area you want affected by the light. Give the switch its own specific lotag, give the S.E. a lotag of 12 and make its hitag the same as the switch's lotag. Shade the S.E.(s) to the brightness of the light when on and shade the actual sector(s) to the "lights off" light level. ■

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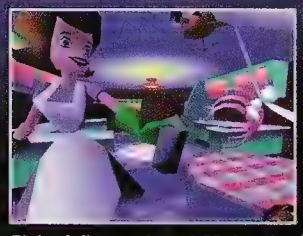

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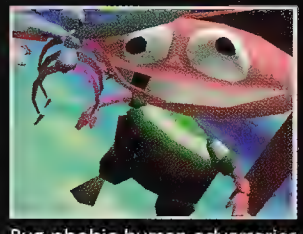

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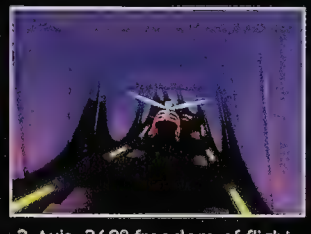

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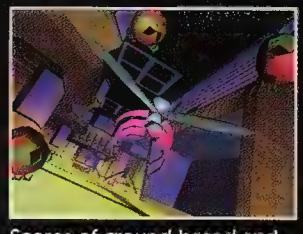

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by Cindy Yans

PowerChess

Makin' the AI squirm

I walked into the room with steely reserve. I *would* be able to sit through yet *another* chess product demo, pretend it was all very interesting and come out smiling and none the worse for wear. Then I met Elon Gasper, Sierra's techno-wizard with a fiercely brilliant gaze and an electric enthusiasm that could probably restart the entire west coast during a power outage. He was on the edge. And then...I met *PowerChess*, and found out why.

It's been over two years since Ken Williams, of The House That Ken Built, asked Elon to develop a chess product. "See what people want that *they* (the competition) don't have, and give it to them." And Elon says he's been beating his head against the white board ever since, but here he sits, fine tuning what may be the finest innovation in serious chess products ever to hit the streets. No kidding.

No schlock product with cute bug and alien animation, *PowerChess* transcends the competition with some of the slickest AI concepts in the Chess sim market. It is based on a Microsoft C++ marriage across unnamed Windows 95 pipes to an instantiation of *WChess*, one of the top chess-playing engines in the world (don't be fooled by *Deep Blue's* hardware girth; *WChess* is one sleek algorithmic and heuristic wonder). Elon disdains members of the *Battle Chess*-like set as novelty items...multimedia fluff...the whoopee cushions of the industry, perhaps.

It seems that most players would much rather play a human opponent than a machine. Why? Because it's more fun. Why? Because, as one nameless soul posted on the Internet, "Computers don't squirm." It's as simple as that. What Elon and his team are attempting to do is create a program that does — about 1/3 of the time less than *you* do. Rather than ruthlessly strangling the player in game after game of long, static struggles, *PowerChess* is designed to assess the level of the player and rise just slightly above it, so that you will be able to win one in three or four games and hence improve your skill.

But the most exciting feature is that your main opponent is a *dynamic* one. The King, as your adaptive opponent, will not only begin at a predetermined level based on your previous experience; his playing engine runs concurrent with *another* engine, the job of which is to analyze the play and to effect changes in the parallel engine's parameters in order to simulate the foibles of the human player, such as overconfidence when ahead, or extreme reticence when behind (he gets teed off when he loses, too, and stomps rudely out of the room with a dour sneer). As much human psychology as possible is threaded into the AI, and how that will play out in final release is an intriguing prospect.

[1] The royal family in precious metal — straight from your safety deposit box

[2] IBM hardware vs. gray matter

[3] Constipation?

[4] The Liz Taylor eye makeup enhances product credibility

[5] The faces of PowerChess

The central match-with-The-King activity is surrounded by a multitude of additional features which inflate the breadth of the product even further. Your anthropomorphic mentor and game analyst is The Queen. She is a character who appears at the top of your screen; as the result of the concurrent engine analysis during play, she is able to take you point by point through the game you have just finished, verbally describing what you did right, what you did wrong, what might have been better, what you should defrost for supper — everything. Talk about a learning tool... She also narrates in this fashion a series of seven great games, from history up to and including the Deep Blue vs. Kasparov upset, as all the while the board lights up positions and paths pertinent to the discussion. The Queen is also your most formidable opponent, if you wish to challenge her. Her game is straight undiluted *WChess* — no water, no polyunsaturated fats, no additives whatsoever.

Other features include: a customizable, annotatable log which you will be able to access like a Microsoft file tree structure — a wonderful tool for serious players; an Autoplay mode where *WChess* is split in two, touches gloves and comes out pushing; Internet-ready software for net play; a barrage of specialized opponents, "commoners," with which to play, each with a quirky style of his or her own; customizable opponents; position setup ability...and believe it or not, I've *still* probably forgotten something.

For the non-serious player (or the serious player with a sense of style), the product is *loaded* with all the fandangle one could want: Tilt 'n' swivel chessboards and gorgeously authentic collectors' sets of chess pieces from which to choose, each with a small essay about its history.

No one buys *King's Quest CCXVIII* because they want to get *better* at playing *King's Quest*. But for chess players, improving their game is always a primary motivation for the purchase of serious chess products. Mix the improvement tool with beauty and with more "humanoid fun" and what emerges? *PowerChess*. Take deep breaths, Elon. It's going to be OK. ■

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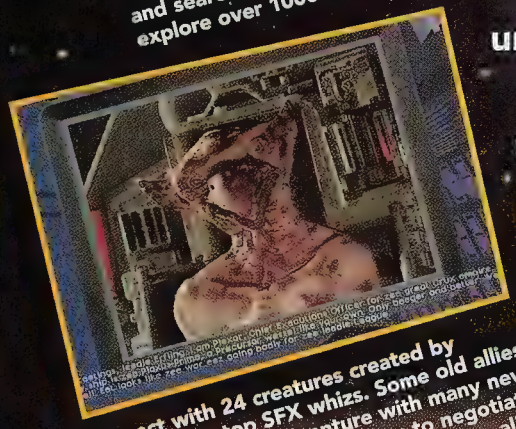

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Interplay

DOS

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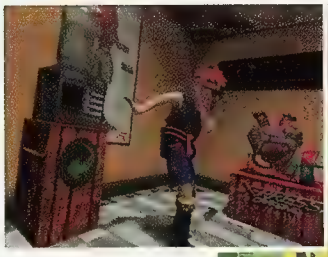

▲ Kent puts a move on the cappuccino machine

▶ Caught without his "Friend of Paul" button, Kent draws Nystalux's wrath

▼ Secretly sighted match boy uses seeing eye RCA dog as his cover

Picture a comic book thought bubble containing the words, "This space intentionally left blank," and let it represent the collective mind of the citizens of Neutropolis. Something normal is going on, and we (yawn) have nothing to say about it one way or the other. Television watching is required 24 hours a day here. See Dick watch TV. Watch, Dick, watch. See Jane change the channel for Dick. Click, Jane, click. We scoff at excitement. Har har. See us scoff. See Dick pet Yappy Puppy. Wag, Yappy Puppy, wag. We are good citizens. We are friends of Paul. Paul says, "Jump, Dick." See Dick ask, "How high?" Such is the world of Neutropolis. Until...

Enter Kent. Now this is one kuul dude. His goatee just *reeks* of radical — and radical is *just* what someone is trying to squelch in the great city of Neutropolis. Someone is enforcing obligatory banality...disguised somehow as normality. *Normality*, Interplay's comedy adventure, places you in the role of Kent, grunge X-er extraordinaire. You have *not* been neutralized and have just been released from prison, after which a mysterious note informs you that indeed you are not alone.

There is an underground movement afoot to overthrow Paul Nystalux, who has somehow managed to mastermind a fascist normalizing regime that grips the city. But how? Meet Dai, the undercover window washer. Meet Heather, organizer of dumpster meeting activities. Meet Brian Deluge, obnoxious rock star of the alternative music crowd. These are several of your allies as you attempt to thwart the Norm troopers stationed everywhere and get to the bottom of the ruthless attempt to maintain a television-addicted, completely unmotivated society.

Meet George Orwell, who at this moment is turning over in his grave to see such cavalier treatment of the very plot he hatched so many years ago. But sorry, George, this is a comedy. Sort of. My biggest problem with the game (I'll reserve the nicer comments for later) is that its sense of humor is strained and works only sporadically. There are several reasons for this. Too much of the humor is sophomoric, but not quite silly *enough* to have reached the so-absurd-that-you-have-to-laugh level (i.e. Kent washes his face in the dirty urinal...yum). And then there's voice actor Corey Feldman, whose Kent is far too canned and stylized to seem as though he's behaving spontaneously. The writers have *something*, of course, to do with the very pat dude-speak that we hear ("Like, tchya — I'd rilly wanna gao in thay-er."), but the delivery becomes very grating after a while. And what about this "tchya" sound? It's definitely California-bred, but the extent to which it becomes Kent's vocal signature is maxed-out, like, totally. Bits of the humor work quite well, though (i.e., bacon and egg wallpaper in the factory cafeteria, health ads for lard, and lines like, "Whoa! It's a soap-impregnated dishcloth!"). Don't shake your head; humor is relative, isn't it? Some might even get a kick out of the urinal scene.

Smaller quibbles are with text-only dialogue (missing vocals) in several sections, and with overly lengthy scene transitions, during which Kent is either tapping his foot looking at his watch, or running madly through a blue and white spiral while the game changes location.

Simple cartoony rendered characters are goofy and appealing, and the (of course) more highly rendered cut scenes are extremely well done, even if the jump from first to third person perspective and back puts us uncomfortably out of sync at times. While the graphical *style* is very primitive, the graphics engine is not. The 360-degree scrolling is smooth and fast with look up/down capabilities. You are able to move virtually everywhere you can see — a very refreshing break from a lot of the limited-path navigation out there — with a successful distance-to-pixelation ratio. Super graphic clipping won't even allow a door to open if you're standing in the way.

It should take quite a while to get through the gamestory for players of medium skill. Puzzles are in many cases not terribly intuitive, but still on-the-proverbial-wall. Collect fingerprints with that (humanly produced) mucus-covered shard of shattered plate-glass...hmmm. One plot branch allows for a slightly different experience, but the ending remains the same. Why this branch? Hard to say, since it *can't* promote replayability... Whimsical inventory abounds, and there are plenty of red herrings.

Although the dude-speak becomes tiring, and the puzzles are not all that ingenious, *Normality* is still a good bet for traditional adventure lovers. None of that there newfangled full-motion video (although motion capture was used for the rendered cut scenes) — only a lark with Kent who insists early on at a job interview, "Yes! I'd like to use furniture on a daily basis!" There can't be any better qualification than that. *–Cindy Yans*

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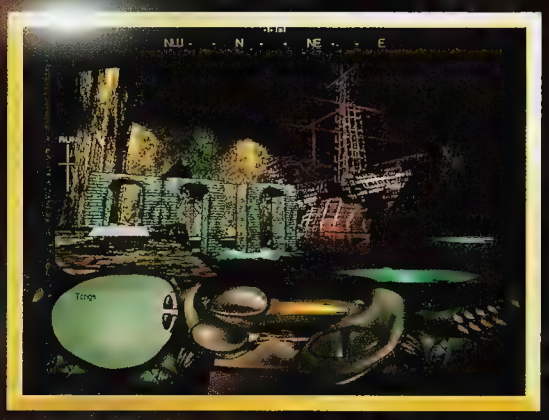

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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Philip Marlowe, Private Eye

Byron Preiss Multimedia Company

Windows

★ ★ ½ ☆ ☆

Best isn't always best. The latest full motion video, enhanced soundtrack (from whichever grunge band still has a breathing lead singer) and dazzling special effects sometimes remove more from a game than they add. It's a pitfall the creators of *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye* clearly managed to sidestep in bringing this title together.

What you'll be treated to is an absorbing, well-produced movie using some simple but effective cel animation techniques. In the likes of a *Dick Tracy* cartoon, *Private Eye* truly looks like a 1940s movie. The voice-overs of the on-screen actors even sound like the old '40s radio shows, and the background music will send Dixieland fanatics diving for their vintage vinyls. It's almost as if you can sense the wafting smoke of a thousand cigarettes billowing in a hazy fog near the ceiling of a shadowy room, with Bogart himself rehearsing the lines with his trademark sneer.

Being able to choose between playing out the original story as it was written, or an alternative plot is a nice touch for anyone who's well acquainted with Philip Marlowe's motion picture exploits. A fairly extensive cast of starlets, thugs, and cops can give you clues about the disappearance of Orrin, the man you are hired to find.

A nicely arranged interface lets you check news on the radio, hear any phone messages, and examine your logbook to brush up on all the people and places you've encountered.

It's no problem tracking all the information you obtain, because a diary is included which thumbprints all your conversations. Your office holds everything from your gun to any evidence you can nab from crime scenes. And there are quite a few crime scenes.

With all that *Private Eye* has going for it, unfortunately the designers omitted a small, yet crucial feature: the mystery. Ironically, you'll spend much of the game searching for something, heck, *anything* needing solving. The facts pertinent to the case are laid out for you far too often. So when you start feeling smug about having learned something important to the case, be warned: somewhere in the conversations to follow, that neat tidbit of deduction will be spelled out plainly like a size 89 Helvetica font.

This unfortunate bent towards giving away critical clues doesn't just happen occasionally during play. It happens for the game's entire duration, with depressing consistency. It's tantamount to playing the board game *Clue* with all the hidden cards taped face up to the frames of your bifocals. Suspense? Only if you're farsighted.

Philip Marlowe, Private Eye:
▶ Philip grills a prospective client
▼ Driving to a crime scene

▲ Voyeur II

Private Eye is the classic case of a good attempt, using all the elements of a great game; but it stumbles in the area of substance, something which should be the very cornerstone of such a product.

If you find yourself in a cold sweat trying to remember the rules for "Duck, Duck, Goose" at parties, then this game will challenge you in ways you've never dreamed of. The rest of us, however, will visit our local video rental shop, and pick up the classic movie the game was based on. At under $5, the money you'll save will give your *Phantasmagoria 2* trust fund a needed boost. –*Tim Royal*

Voyeur II

Philips Media

DOS

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

After much research, we've finally discovered where ex-sitcom stars go to die. It used to be permanent spots on *Hollywood Squares*, or repeating guest-starring roles in such epic productions such as *The Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island*. Now, you *know* you've been out of the loop for a few too many years when you appear in an interactive CD-ROM adventure thingee.

That's exactly where Jennifer O'Neill, ex-*Rhoda* star David Groh and Dennis Weaver find themselves, trapped in the game called *Voyeur II*. While ostensibly an exercise in mouse clicking and extensive viewing of well-produced video, it does generate some interest due to its sordid premise.

The game puts you, the player, in scumbag mode as you use your high-powered video and audio equipment to eavesdrop on the Cussler family, yet another poster-family for dysfunction. How you can manage to watch the action from various dramatic angles is a bigger mystery than who killed Dr. Everett Cussler, and who, unless you stop them, will also off Dr. Elizabeth Duran (O'Neill). You follow characters from room to room, catching snippets of conversation, admissions of guilt, and watching characters engage in all sorts of sordid things.

The cast chews scenery right and left, and figuring out the right path through the game is fairly difficult, but its damning flaw is that it's so repetitious. If you watch the wrong films, you will run out of power, and will be forced to start over again, without the usual safety net of a saved game. You'll quickly grow tired of watching the same conversations and sex scenes over and over again (yup, there's sex, violence, bad language, and all of the other things that make a film great).

If you get over the fact that *Voyeur II* really isn't a game, and assuming you're a sucker for this sort of cheesiness, you might find something interesting. It does prey upon your desire to be nosy, and you will feel rather, hey, voyeuristic. That's still not enough to elevate it from its general level of mediocrity. – *Steve Bauman*

Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom

Time Warner Electronic Publishing

DOS

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

It's beautiful...it's mystical...it's (shudder) educational. It's *Qin* (pronounced "ching", as our press materials inform us). Time Warner Electronic Publishing presents *Qin: Tomb of the Middle Kingdom*, a romp (?) through an eerie unpopulated environment filled with strange and fanciful artifacts and devices. Set in the unexcavated burial tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first Emperor of China, *Qin* places the player in the role of an amateur archaeologist whose job it is to solve puzzles

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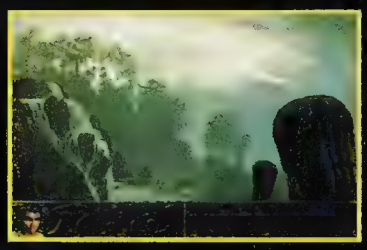
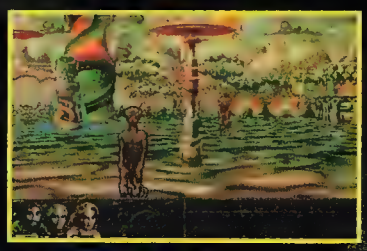


DISCOVER...



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Blue Byte

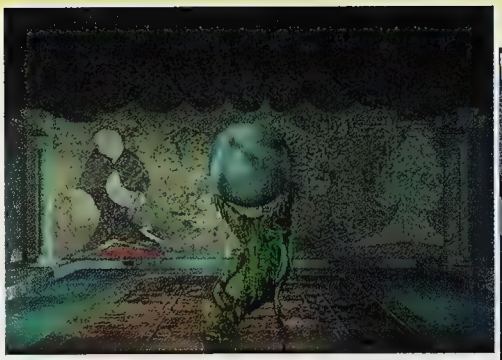
of assorted difficulty and survive pitfalls in order to unravel the mysteries of this historical underworld.

Luyen Chou, president of development company Learn Technologies Interactive (LTI), has had a personal and professional stake in the making of this product. Called a "labor of love" for Chou, the game was born of his own curiosity about the tomb which he visited on a family trip. Chou's father, a professional composer and music teacher who was born in China, has worked with his students to create the original score which has become the soundtrack for *Qin*. He must also be something of a historian, since much of the text, photographic and encyclopedic references in the game (and there are seemingly *thousands* of them) has been attributed to him as well. The balance must have been accomplished through tons and tons of academic investigation (pronounced "research").

Qin is divided into five separate realms: the Plaza, the Palace, the Crypt, the Garden and the Mountain. Solving puzzles in each realm grants access to the next and eventually one reaches an endgame. For me, the endgame was blessed reward and relief from having plodded through the seemingly endless series of puzzles. I say endless but as it turns out, the game is *not* terribly long (if one is a puzzler of medium proficiency). It just seems that way.

The beauty of the artwork and soundtrack is indisputable. The amount of information available is astounding. Ancient Chinese mythology, alchemy, medicine, art, religion, literature, architecture...any historical aspect imaginable is present in the *Qin* on-line encyclopedia. The problem is that I prefer *not* to have to examine yards and yards of textual rhetoric during my gaming. All puzzles do not require searching the encyclopedia for entries that refer to puzzle-related material, but many do — and it becomes annoying...and tedious — something that *Jewels of the Oracle,* another masterpiece of historical research, managed to avoid. The gameworld is hypnotic to the point of being somniferous, and while it is difficult not to appreciate the distinction of the extraordinary artwork and informational content, it is also difficult not to fall asleep after just a little while — and in this case even sleep might be construed as a more enjoyable activity (pronounced "fun").

Anyone interested in the culture and history of China will be impressed by this product. In fact, *anyone* will probably be impressed by this product. But most of us do not buy games to be impressed; we buy them to have fun. As a work of art *Qin* succeeds masterfully. As a game, well, it leaves a lot to be desired. After the look of the game dutifully extracts an "ooooh.." from our lips, its heavy-handedness becomes wearing — not at all what we look for in a *successful* explore-the-empty-world-chock-full-of-strange-devices type game (pronounced "*Myst*"). *–Cindy Yans*



The identity of the green device supporting the globe is anyone's guess

Zoinks, Scoob, it's a murder!

Santa Fe Mysteries: The Elk Moon Murder

Activision

WIndows 95, DOS, Mac

★★★★☆

Maybe it's because having human actors in computer games is such a new thing, but there's just not a lot of ethnicity out there. Yes, a few "people of color" have turned up in games like *Ripper* and the *Wing Commander* saga, but you certainly don't get a sense of heritage from those characters. Now that's not an *awful* state of affairs, but it helps explain why *The Elk Moon Murder* stands out from the crowd and comes across with such... class. It takes place in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a city where people of different racial heritage are thrown together in the intense desert heat. It's a volatile combination.

A potter named Anna Elk Moon has been shot through the head, and a valuable pot has been stolen from her studio. But was Elk Moon killed for the pot, or because of her high-profile politics, her tumultuous love life, or for simple revenge? The player is the detective who must find out the answer in five days, before federal agents take over the investigation.

To skirt the issue of how different characters will react to a player of unknown descent, your Native American partner, John Night Sky, will ask all the questions. You do get to choose which questions he asks, however, and follow whichever leads suit your fancy. Night Sky will be happy to supply his own opinion, if asked (unfortunately, he seems to think that *everyone* is guilty, so take his advice with a rock of salt).

As it turns out, this city is home to more strange bedfellows than *Peyton Place*. You will need a scorecard to keep up with who's sleeping with whom. This complicates the investigation more than a little, since almost *nobody* is willing to tell the truth about where they were on the night of the murder. I must say the actors did a fine job. There was a serious risk of scenery chewing with so many soapy sub-plots, but the hysteria never reaches the level of, say, *Days Our Lives*. It all feels Prime Time serious.

In a very rare dialog tree situation, it is *not* always a good idea to ask everybody every possible question. Each question "costs" you fifteen minutes of your five days of game time. Some of your time will also be taken up by forensics reports, alibi verification, and errands straight from the chief. Follow the wrong lead or ask too many obvious questions and you'll never reach the end in time.

Obviously, you can't get an arrest warrant on a whim. You need a motive and an alibi that's less than airtight before you can file the paperwork and lock up your suspect. You will only get one chance, so save your game early and often. Don't forget, you're on the trail of a killer here, and he or she is not above adding another corpse to the pile.

Though this is not a science fiction game, there is one piece of technological hocus-pocus that unifies your investigation: the PDA (Personal Digital Assistant). This hand-held gizmo lets you review interview footage and notes, sort files, receive orders from headquarters, pick up your mail... it all sounds like one of those Orwellian AT&T commercials ("Ever renewed your passport while taking a shower? You will!" etc.). But don't forget, using all that handy information at your fingertips can also eat up case time.

One of the concerns many gamers have with this sort of product is replayability (and rightly so). Well, there is only one ending in this mystery, and you make your way through the five "days" of action in a couple of hours, so it is possible that you will solve the game inside of an afternoon. Possible, but not likely. This is a well developed storyline, and there are a number of false directions your investigation could take.

Even if you do solve *The Elk Moon Murder* the first time around, you're bound to be amazed at the richness of the setting, the fine acting, and the sharp design. This is a high quality product, and it's bound to leave players hungry for the next installment of Activision's *Santa Fe Mysteries*. Stay tuned. *–John Voorhees*

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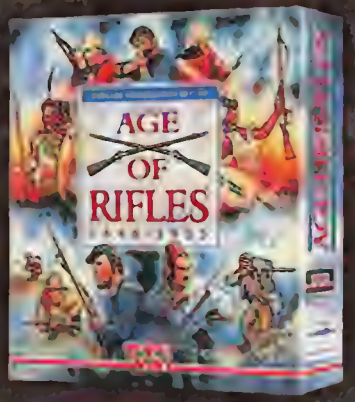

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by Steve Wartofsky

Opening up the simulation

Crunch goes reminiscing about the good old days of VGA

Are any of you still flying Falcon 3.0, by the way? I ask because – after having gotten used to the graphics of more recent simulations, specifically, the quality of the in-cockpit instrument detail possible now that most of those are presented in some form of SVGA – I was surprised to see how much chunkier the instruments and HUD symbology in *Falcon 3.0* look than I'd recently remembered. Makes me want to ramp a couple of other newer sims back down to VGA mode, just to see what kind of speed and graphics performance improvement it will make.

Flight Unlimited remains unique in its ability to expand your understanding of all the basic techniques that go into putting together a full-scale flight simulation. Spend time with that Configuration screen!

Surprisingly – well, depending on the sim, we won't pick on any particulars this month – in many cases making the move from SVGA back to VGA doesn't make all that much difference, assuming you leave many of the texture-mapping and other graphics options turned up high. In some cases, even turning all the high-end graphics 3D rendering techniques off *still* doesn't make the difference you'd think it might. This should come as no surprise to people familiar with complex air combat simulations, since they'll know that there's a *lot* more than just the graphics being calculated with most of these products. In fact, let me suggest you go through all your current simulations (by which I mean those which have been released over, say, the past two years) and do the VGA test: turn everything having to do with graphics processing off, then see what kinds of performance differences you see.

Yes, it's finally reached the point where Falcon 3.0 is starting to look seriously dated. This is a good thing. On the other hand it runs like a screaming banshee on most hardware people have today...

The strange thing is, those simulations which offer the least improvement as a result of doing the above are the ones I'd tend to trust the most as solid simulations; the minor differences in performance due to dropping off the SVGA/3D rendering graphics overhead would suggest that the speed issue has primarily to do with the sophistication of the simulation itself. The kinds of things being calculated which are most likely to provide both performance hits and simulation quality are – to remind relative newcomers to the field – flight modeling (of course, especially if it's 6DOF, meaning "six degrees of freedom," fully three-dimensional in control, in other words, with full yaw and roll components), AI for friendly and opponent aircraft, environment modeling (wind, ground effects, etc.), ballistics (flight and trajectory modeling for fired weapons systems), and, finally – for modern jet aircraft – electronic instruments, including HUDs and MFDs.

Now, this leads to an interesting question: in a couple of recent, full-scale racing simulations of note (sure, I'll name 'em here: *IndyCar II*, *NASCAR Racing* and the new kid on the block, *Grand Prix II*), a very useful approach to optimizing graphics performance is included. Basically, you enable or disable various options, and you're given an estimate of what the resulting frame rate might be.

Why not do the same thing for the various levels of simulation detail? I know that some designers are planning to further optimize the way they handle simultaneous real-time combat in the game environment during play, by basically turning off and on the level of detail and granularity of the simulation of same, contingent upon the player's proximity to this combat (the closer you are, the more simulation takes place; the further you are, the more it resolves itself into numeric abstraction. The former is the innovation here). If designers can do this for themselves as they try to squeeze extra cycles out of the CPU (because, basically, that's where it all comes from, I think we're going to find out more and more), why can't they put control over such things further into players' hands?

Sure, we get some of that already, by being allowed to choose various levels of "difficulty" when setting up an air combat simulation.

It seems like everyone these days is throwing together some plastic handles with a few buttons and passing them off as joysticks. But I'm a serious gamer. When I want a joystick, I look for a real one. From CH Products.

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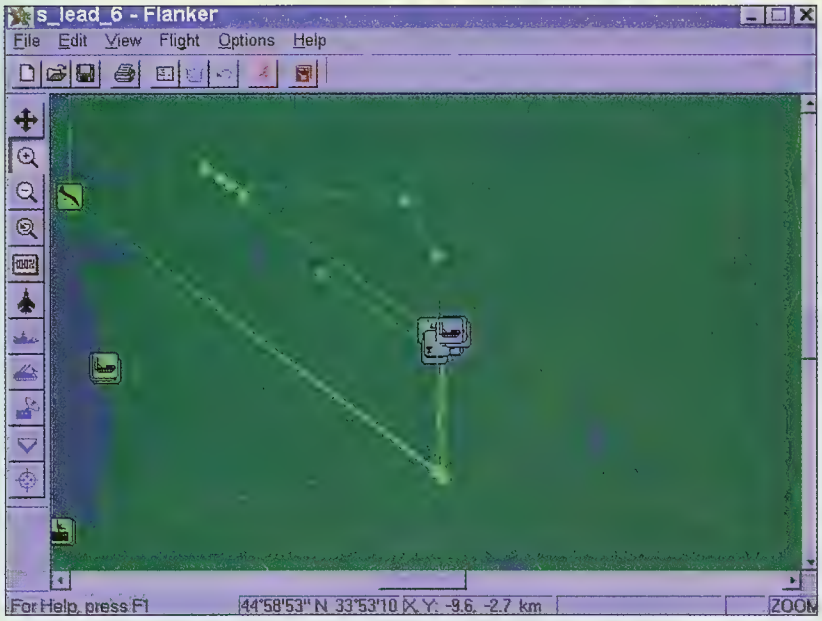
Basically, when you choose "Novice" or "Easy" modes, the computer turns a bunch of simulation stuff off, and you often get improved performance, along with a greater sense of immortality and ultimate power (again, try this at home). The problem is, except for the usual routine of telling the player you've ramped down the difficulty of flying the aircraft (with maybe a few simple things turned off, like rudder control or ground effect for helicopter sims) and eased up on the challenge of the enemy AI, there's not much indication of what, exactly, has been left out as you turn things down towards "Easy."

Perhaps the naming of the categories or options is all wrong. Maybe we shouldn't be thinking in terms of "Easy" vs. "Expert" settings, "Simplified" vs. "Full Realism" settings; maybe that's way too black and white. One person's notion of realistic is another person's idea of wasteful extras. What I'd like to see is someone releasing an in-depth simulation, with all the features you could imagine, accompanied by an intelligent, extensive discussion (it could even be in an included help-file, wouldn't have to burn another 5,000 acres of forest just to make thick manuals to do this!) of the kinds of trade-offs *all across the board* for the enabling and disabling of various "realistic" features. This would of course also mean that the player would have full, configurable control in detail over which aspects of realism could be turned on or off.

Sound way too tweaky for most players? Not really; the reason many people who really like "serious" air combat simulations get into them in the first place is because they like the metaphor of what I call the computer within the computer. A full-scale simulation provides a series of sophisticated systems, real-time models and instruments, all of which – taken together – comprise the equivalent of a software virtual computer system. Digging into a sophisticated simulation along such lines has all the pleasures (and often without the headaches) tweak-geeks can derive from optimizing their real computers, with the added attractions which more usually accompany entertainment software. Yes, it's a scary thought, but there are people who *like* to tweak their computers; they're probably mostly sim-heads as well.

Having a simulation with all the simulation technologies exposed would be simulation paradise; it wouldn't be enough just to know what's going on – you'd need to have the chance to intervene and then see what effects different choices had on overall performance and modeling of reality.



While there's not a lot to do to reconfigure the simulation details in Su-27, its mission planner does give the player detailed control (and understanding) of the issues that come into play when putting together an electronic battlefield

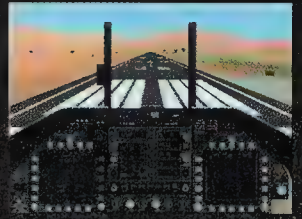
Microsoft's upcoming Flight Simulator 6.0 provides substantially greater detail than its predecessor, and we're not talking just graphics screen!

Ultimately, what this would boil down to would be a marvelously flexible simulation, one which could be tailored to a wide variety of what people consider realistic or interesting or manageable simulation. One day you could drop all the instrument stuff, turn the enemy AI and flight performance and ground targeting systems technology up high, and learn all about that; next day, you could drop the latter and turn up the former and focus on that. You'd have in your hands basically a tool for learning about what simulations can actually do in all these areas. You could also decide, over time, what matters to you while you're in a mission and what doesn't, and save cycles and increase performance by getting rid of all the stuff that you, personally, consider irrelevant.

Such an in-depth tweak/analysis of air combat simulation would be of benefit to the entire audience for this kind of thing; it would only lead to further respect and understanding of what's already been accomplished, in simulations which take all such systems and factors into account. Some of it has already occurred, either through add-on texts explaining the details of a simulation, or through a limited ability to make such decisions (*Flight Unlimited*, yet again, comes to mind as the ultimate instruction not only in how to *fly* a flight simulator, but in how the basics of such things are put together; spend time with the various preferences and options, easily available within the software, to see what I mean). But much remains to be done along such lines. As always, the key to success in flight and air combat simulation is the simplest thing in the world: *give the player the choice*. Stop for a moment and compare those simulations you've owned over the years with each other; have you found the ones with more choices along such lines the ones you've come back to, time and time again? I have. Write in and let me know what you think. Crunch Out. ■

REACH OUT AND TORCH SOMEONE.

F/A-18 HORNET



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by Ben Chiu

Vertical maneuvering

Part II: More of the basics

This month we continue our discussions on vertical maneuvering basics. Specifically, we'll talk about why you'd want to use the vertical plane and how to use it efficiently.

Strategy aspects

Basically, just as with any air combat maneuvering, there are only two reasons for going vertical: to turn and set up your kill shot or to escape one. I suppose the most common question then becomes, "if I just want to turn, why would I do it vertically?" This question can be answered on two different levels: out of necessity or for the sake of efficiency.

Escape and kill

The simplest, most basic reason to use the vertical plane is because your opponent immediately warrants it. If you're defensive and don't have a high enough energy speed advantage over your attacker to get away, you'll need to maneuver so as to only allow your opponent the most difficult shots at you as you try and disengage. Granted, you never should have gotten yourself in this losing position in the first place, but nevertheless, since you're already there, you have to deal with it. Maneuvers on the oblique plane (which requires a vertical component) are the most difficult to achieve gun solutions for. If your situations were switched, your opponent would try the same thing on you. This would require that you follow him. You'd have to go vertical as well to make the kill. That of course is assuming he's in range, you've been doing everything well and kept your energy level high enough and in an aircraft able to allow it, etc..

Efficiency

The other reason for going vertical is because sometimes it can be a more efficient way to turn. The deciding factor on which is best is dependent on pilot proficiency, flight modeling, specific aircraft performance, energy state, and your current strategic positioning in relation to your opponent. Since we're still dealing with basics at this point, let's talk about turning without a bandit breathing down your neck with a substantial strategic advantage over you (overwhelming advantage of speed and/or altitude). Let's assume we're outside of the bandit's weapons range and far enough away, with enough energy to turn in any direction without the risk of immediately taking hits (remember we're talking about guns only, prop fighters now).

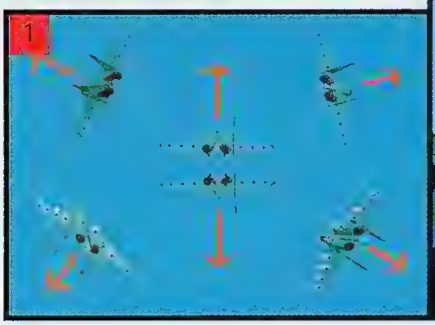
Any turn, whether vertical or horizontal, will cost you energy. Many argue that one way may net less energy loss than others; however, I haven't seen any proof for perfect solutions with a particular turn. The same variables – pilot proficiency, flight modeling, specific aircraft performance, energy state, and your current strategic positioning – affect your chances in all cases. Nevertheless, I do believe that going vertical to turn, in the example we're using, does offer an advantage. Let's take a look at why. As we've discussed previously, a high rate, level turn will bleed your airspeed. After the turn you end up with a loss of kinetic energy. Note that while turning level to the left or right nets the same results, when going vertical, due to gravity, going up or down yields very different results. This of course, as we've briefly discussed in part one, affects your energy status and turn rate.

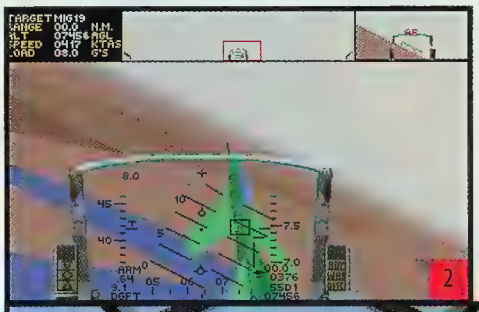
Up or down

The two most common ways to turn an airplane around going up or down are the Immelman and the Split-S. Besides where the half roll portion is performed, the main difference is that one is a climbing maneuver and the other a diving maneuver. Let's look at how they differ in efficiency. The Split-S trades potential energy (altitude) for kinetic energy. At the end of the "turn" (maneuver), you still net a loss of energy, but technically speaking, what you've lost in altitude, you've gained back (somewhat) in speed. This is markedly different from a level turn. However, as we've discussed, potential energy is harder to come by than kinetic energy. With an Immelman, you trade speed for altitude, and potential energy can be more valuable in the long run. This means that climbing vertical turns/maneuvers such as the Immelman and half Cuban-8 do bear an advantage over the others. In addition, you can generally get turned around quicker using an "Immelman" rather than a Split S (if you have enough energy to complete the Immelman). As we discussed last time, with the Immelman, gravity works while your airspeed is the slowest. With the Split S, your airspeed is generally higher (you can throttle back, but it costs you energy, even though your potential energy loss is less) and we know that higher airspeeds produce a wider turning radius.

Retaining Energy

Of course, the above examples are only valid if the pilot performs either maneuver with equal levels of skill. It is quite easy for a pilot to "hose" away his energy, regardless of the direction of the maneuver. A well executed level turn can easily out-





[1]Lift is considered to act perpendicular to the wings. This is referred to as the lift vector. Regardless of your airplanes orientation in the sky, your lift vector acts perpendicular to your wings [2]There are only two reasons for going vertical - to turn and setup your kill shot or to escape one. "Hosing" your energy is okay if you get the kill and won't be in danger immediately afterwards [3]Maneuvers on the oblique plane are the most difficult to achieve gun solutions for. However, unless they're accompanied by some randomness and pull some G's, they are ineffective [4]Variables such as pilot proficiency, flight modeling, specific aircraft performance, energy state, and your current strategic positioning greatly affect the importance of vertical maneuvering. Air Warrior has one of the most difficult (read realistic) flight models around. Use of the vertical plane is necessary for success and survival

perform (in efficiency) a very sloppy vertical maneuver any day of the week. So, just how do you retain as much energy as possible? Read on.

Smooth moves

The most common "energy waster" is what I call a lack of finesse. Yanking the stick around or not being precise with your movements all contribute to wasting energy. If you adjust your stick movements constantly with corrections and over corrections, you can be assured that you're wasting energy. While stick corrections are inevitable, just bear in mind that the more you correct, the more it will drain your energy reserves. While offering advice on something as abstract as stick action is at best difficult to do in print, I'll offer these tips. It helps to think a little ahead of where you want the stick to be and to thus move the stick slowly (but not too slowly) to where it should be. This will cut down on the over corrections, as you'll be able to "feel" how the aircraft is handling and get a better sense for how much movement is necessary before you get there. This reduces the tendency to overshoot your goal. As to yanking the stick around, it is a common misconception that if you use more stick than you actually need, you can get to the desired aircraft position faster than if you didn't. While your control surface movement is faster, regardless of the over-correction problem mentioned, if you move the controls faster than the airflow over these surfaces can accept, you'll cause local disturbances and actually decrease the rate of desired aircraft reaction. This is in addition to the extra drag (with loss of kinetic energy) such conditions contribute to. Note that while excess control inputs affect both ailerons and elevators, aileron movement creates much less drag than elevator movements. Recall that excess elevator input leads to stalls and accelerated stalls. Both are to be avoided at all costs. As you know, stalls rob you of energy.

He who hesitates can win

When tailing a bandit moving in the vertical plane, it is useful in some cases to hesitate a bit before following him up. Well, hesitate is probably the wrong word to use. Follow him, but at a slower rate. The idea is to expend your energy at a lower rate than your opponent. This gives you the opportunity to nail him up at the top if he gets too slow, or the chance to meet him with a higher airspeed on his way back down if he goes that way. By not immediately following him up and over, you can see what he's going to do and will have energy to do something about it.

Tips

As we discussed sometime last year, one of the first things you should do when flying a new plane (hopefully before going into combat with it) is find out what the minimum speed is to do an "Immelman," or Loop. Once you know that, try your hardest never to fly below that speed unless you can make the kill and won't be in immediate danger afterwards. When doing diving maneuvers, note that it can be difficult to pull out of a dive and you can black out very easily. If you throttle back when doing the half loop portion, this will allow you to complete with a less loss in altitude, but you'll net a loss in airspeed.

The lift vector

Lift is considered to act perpendicular to the wings. This is referred to as the *lift vector*. Regardless of your airplanes orientation in the sky, your lift vector acts perpendicular to your wings. What is important about accepting this fact is that airplanes can generate more positive lift than negative lift. We'll discuss this further in the future, I just wanted to mention this term now so you won't be surprised when we refer to it later.

Until next time remember - there are no rewards for how much ammo you have left over when you get shot down. ■

The new racing standard

Grand Prix II

Microprose

DOS

★★★★★

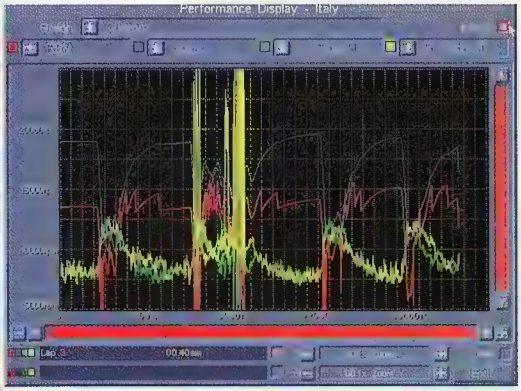
Thanks to a licensing agreement with the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA - F1's governing body), MicroProse's follow- up to the immensely popular *World Circuit* now gives you the privilege to race against Formula 1 superstars like Michael Schumacher, Damon Hill, Gerhard Berger, Jean Alesi, and Mikka Hakkinen (on a computer of course, but in reality, the closest the vast majority of us F1 fans will ever get). The simulation pits you against a re-creation of the 1994 F1 season. Rather than having to rewrite the drivers and team names and drive generic, plain colored cars as you did in the previous title, here the software accurately (and beautifully) reproduces all of the F1 sponsors, cars, and drivers, right down to their helmets. The design also depicts the rule changes – such as the banning of traction control and the addition of downforce reducing planks – implemented around the time of the Ayrton Senna tragedy.

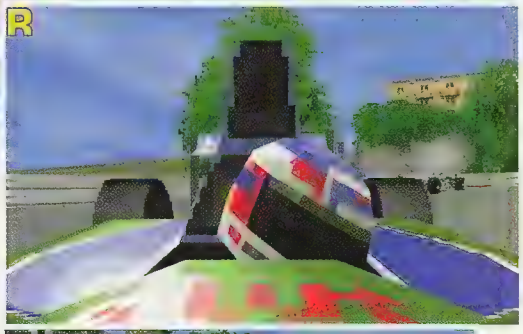
I know you've all seen the ads for the game. Well, I'm thrilled to report that the SVGA graphics are fantastic. The texture mapping, smoke and gravel effects, the attention to small details, while somewhat cartoon-like at times, are even better than the ads depict. Now, the people at MicroProse either have too much free time on their hands or they're fanatics about their work (probably the latter). After watching the driver's heads turn and bob up and down as they drive along; after watching the reflection of the sun dance across the noses of the cars, I knew someone had been putting in a lot of overtime. Nevertheless, as always, killer graphics come at a price. On a fast P100, we maintained around 420% CPU occupancy with full details and 25.6fps in SVGA mode. I'd estimate that on a P200 or PPro200 you should be able to get a comfortably high frame rate at full detail (that probably sounds like a stupid comment, but there are sims out that can't say even that). For the rest of us "hardware challenged" types, *Grand Prix II* has VGA mode, which is also quite pleasing, and runs acceptably on mid-range equipment. However, be forewarned: once you see the game in SVGA, you'll want to upgrade.

Speaking of hardware, while a wheel-and-pedal combo is highly recommended, you can drive the game with a keyboard, because all of the optional driving aids from *World Circuit* – such as steering help (aka "driving line magnet"), auto-braking and throttle help – remain. However, if you go with the controller hardware, you'll experience the most advanced control configuration setup for cars I've ever seen. You can use any combination of controllers you can think of. This includes non-standard and home-made rigs. *Grand Prix II* even supports a clutch, if you have one. Most notably, you can now adjust the travel rates of your controls. This means real progressive braking, and velocity sensitive steering. Gone are the days of mashing the brake pedal to the floor in every corner; you have to drive these cars.

When you first start driving laps, the car modeling in the design isn't readily apparent. This is mainly because you are only given a generic car setup to start with, and naturally, how it feels is highly dependent on your setup. However, make no mistake about it, working on your car here actually does something useful, and is ultimately the only way to go fast. The attention to the real world racing detail is unparalleled; more than that – it's awesome. In addition to having control over the usual brake bias, gear ratios, wings, and sway bars, in this incarnation you can adjust packers, springs and damper (shocks) valving! This means you have control over both bump and rebound velocity sensitive dampening. If you have no idea what this means, don't worry; you have the option of learning and adjusting things in levels, so you can leave them alone until you're ready. When you want to delve into the next steps, the included manual does a very good job of explaining F1 car dynamics; there's also a data recorder that charts your car's performance, to help you along. While this is all cutting edge, state of the art stuff, it's unusual that one of the simplest auto racing setup tricks *hasn't* been included: taking tire temps.

The enhancements to *Grand Prix II* don't stop there. There are really too many to list, but here are a few of my favorites: you can leave the ground if you touch wheels with





Clockwise from above: With progressive braking and velocity sensitive steering, you really have to drive these cars. Otherwise you will leave the ground if you touch wheels with another car or launch it over a curb; World Circuit Racing: Grand Prix II pits you against a re-creation of the 1994 F1 season and accurately reproduces all of the F1 sponsors, cars, and drivers in stunning SVGA; There's a data recorder that charts your car's performances to help you setup your car. This is "cutting edge","state of the art" stuff; The driver's heads turn and bob up and down as they drive along. Note that the reflection of the sun also dances across the noses of the cars! Simply incredible!; Although the graphic enhancements are most noticeable surface changes, there is a lot more "meat" to this sim (and make no mistake about it, this is a sim as well as a fun driving "game.") if you want it. If you're into racing sims, you'll be playing this one for years

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another car or launch it over a curb; if you cut the track, you will be black flagged and forced to slow down; the gravel trap run-off areas kick up gravel when you drive into them, and you can hear the gravel hit your car; the sounds are also very realistic, and add favorably to the immersion effect; and you can "smoke" your tires and watch it in the rear view mirrors (where's the horn!?). Best of all, you now have more sophisticated pit strategy considerations and mechanical failures to deal with. All of the above add greatly to the simulation, both for feel and gameplay.

Unfortunately, no sim is perfect, and this one also has a down side. While the rather silly but sometimes handy two player-single machine "round robin" mode found in *World Circuit* also returns, so do the multi-player modem and serial modes. However, modem play is rather sluggish even with all graphic details turned off (it's highly affected by the slowest machine, something technically referred to as "frame lock"). We haven't tried serial connection (yet!), but it *should* work better. Finally, the menu structure is a bit chaotic, but it was just about the same in *World Circuit;* we all learned to live with it.

To sum up, *Grand Prix II* sets a new standard, just like its predecessor, but in a very flashy package. Although the graphic enhancements are the most noticeable surface changes, there is a *lot* more meat to this simulation if you want it. If you're into racing sims, you'll be playing this one for *years*. If you like *IndyCar Racing 2*, you'll also like *Grand Prix II;* if you liked *World Circuit*, you'll *love Grand Prix II*! Unless you hate driving, or don't have fairly good hardware or controllers, you'll be sorry if you miss this one. Except for the modem play, *Grand Prix II* blows the doors off anything else on the track.–*Ben Chiu*

Back to Bagdad

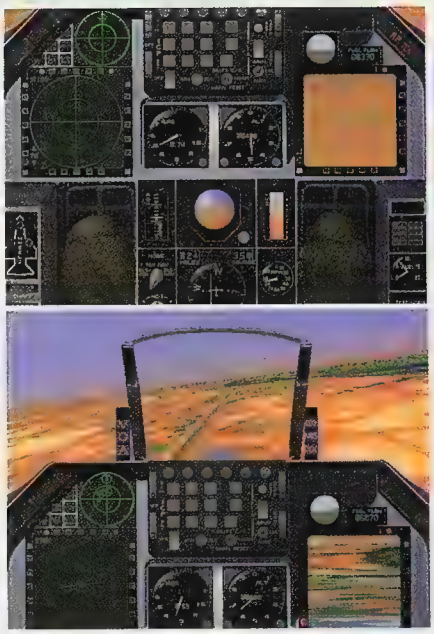
Military Simulations, Inc.

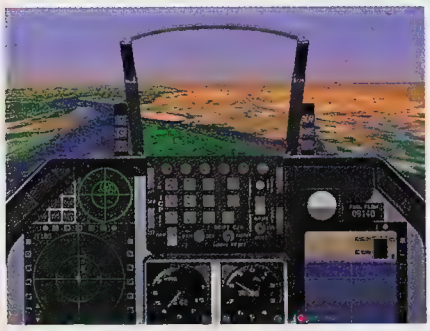
DOS

★★★★☆

Everyone's still aiming at *Falcon 3.0* as the target to beat in one way or another; mainly in the area of pure simulation. Better graphics – and even simulation detail – have appeared since *F3*'s heyday, but only in bits and pieces.

While some (mainly the boot 'n scoot crowd) will find *Back to Baghdad* more work than fun, once you get past the miserable load times (yes, even with 32MB of RAM, a fast SCSI-2 hard drive and optimized disk cacheing and a super-fast 8x CD-ROM drive, some Zen meditation is required prior to each mission), it's clear that here's the first *real* contender for the serious simulation crown we've seen since SSI's release of *Su-27*. The amount of detail that's gone into the instrumentation and flight modeling, in particular, puts this product well ahead of everything else currently available in the area of reliable representation of real-world correlatives.





Clockwise from top left:

Head-down mode gives you full instrumentation to work with – amazing realism

Target lased – ready to go!

Heading in for the kill, AAA flaming away, GBU at ready

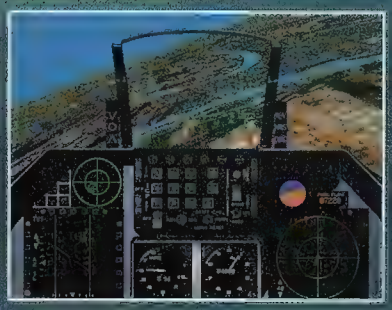
It all depends on what it is you're trying to achieve. Personally, when I have the time to really dig in I crave a simulation which will reveal something to me about the way real-world electronic, optical and radar detection systems work from inside a modern air combat cockpit. This one's got all that in droves, complete with radar azimuth, elevation and lock control (the latter via mouse or on-stick trackball, if so desired) for the onboard radar; TWIS detail and object of interest selection, and a full suite of both air-air and air-ground radar modes for every conceivable combat situation for the F-16. The symbology as well as the relevant targeting, tracking and lock options for the various weapons systems the F-16 can handle all go about as far as it's possible to go in this area in a non-classified simulation – to the point where you can even rig up an off-board monochrome monitor to simulate the in-cockpit MFD. The ability to cycle through the different sensor systems (with the Cycle Sensor of Interest key, 8) might seem like a nuisance to non-sim types, but again – gives you the kind of fine control and focus necessary to really learn the systems once you've gotten past the initial familiarization with basic techniques.

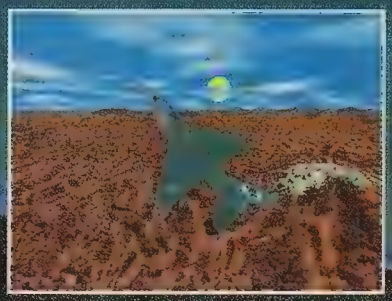
The massively sophisticated instrumentation model for *B2B* doesn't *need* more than a keyboard to handle, but if you really want to optimize both your own mission performance and your sense of realism while running this software, a good set of solid Thrustmaster hardware (*FLCS*, *TQS* in particular) contributes mightily to the experience. It's probably reasonable to say that this is the first simulation that really does full justice to the 'stick realism Thrustmaster's been striving for; once you've got all the macros installed and uploaded to the joystick hardware, and a monochrome monitor attached, and you've learned the routine, well, this *is* flying an F-16 – that's all there is to it. I don't know whether the USAF would consider such PC-based setups sufficient for serious pilot training, but from this civilian point of view it certainly seems like a good ways towards such a goal. It's definitely a serious study in the subject.

Contributing to the sense you're really working with near-F16-level realism and detail is the excellent flight model for this simulation. With the exception of *Microsoft Flight Simulator* and *Flight Unlimited*, nothing else out there provides the kind of continuous, 6DoF performance feedback you find here when making turns. Energy bleeds off at a much more rapid pace than usual for PC-based simulations, and somehow that feels right; for the first time, I feel like I have to consider my turns intelligently, without experiencing the massive excess of reserve energy (read speed) most sims maintain even with hard, 4-6g pulled banks. Performance changes with load and elevation, as it should. Again, the simulation achieves things in these areas *F3* aimed at but never absolutely reached.

The problems with *Back to Baghdad* are going to be a) the load times – more file optimization (planned) and something *other* than trying to load all of the Middle East into 32MB of RAM at the start of each mission has to be tried here (I exaggerate, but only slightly); and b) the learning curve – ***WARNING****: this is not a toy*. The manual, structure, overall *style* of the design assumes the *F3*-head as the primary objective; if you've been there, done that, this is for you. Fans of more recent, simpler (critics might say more elegant and fun) designs could balk because of both of the above. My advice? Patience, and adjustment of expectations to what this thing does. Go with the flow of this design and you'll soon find yourself pooh-poohing most else out there, when it comes to pure, realistic simulation. Games are for kids. –*Steve Wartofsky* ■

THE ULTIMATE BATTLE





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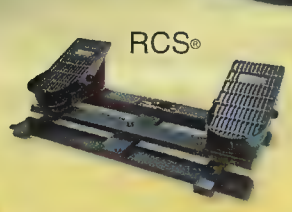

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Preview

Front Page Sports Football Pro '97, Golf & Trophy Bass II

Sierra

The *Front Page Sports* series has become an institution for Sierra, though it's often caused players to wish they were institutionalized. All of the games in the series have had numerous innovations and superb features, but they've always managed to seem a bit, how shall we say it, incomplete? This year we'll see the series make its next move, and one that will hopefully induce stability. All of the games will finally be true Windows applications, something that will (hopefully) make previous sound problems go away.

Take this year's model of *Football Pro '96*. While it added sharp high-resolution graphics, the play editor was a holdover from the previous version, and didn't run with the same disregard for base RAM (it wanted about 580K free, which was easy when running Windows 95, but brought back horrific memories of CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT tinkering). Then there were those weird sound bugs and other problems, all of which managed to overshadow its many excellencies.

Football Pro '97 is – like *Baseball Pro '96* – more of a Windows conversion than a complete rewrite. Most of the interface and on-field action will be familiar to players of the '96 model, with the inclusion of numbers on players' jerseys (using ordinal texture mapping, allowing proper shadows and wrinkles) and an increase in the number of animation angles (up to 16 from eight) being the most obvious improvements.

Most of the more important changes improve the overall usability of the product, with the play editor receiving the most attention. A new play editor takes a large amount of the manual drudgery out of creating plays. Utilizing a "Play Wizard," it defaults to a large number of pre-set formations and routes. Hopefully it will give the player enough options to create quick and dirty plays, while still providing the hard-core player with the sort of fine control they've become accustomed to. One final addition is that the play now takes into account the varying speeds of players when you run the plays, eliminating those annoying delays on sweeps and timing patterns.

Like *Baseball Pro '96*, a new "League News" function will take some of the drudgery out of checking out the status of the league, displaying all roster changes with a single listing. Other refinements include the ability to change stats on an entire team or league globally (a welcome feature that many add-on editors provided). From the editor screens there will be shortcut buttons to allow the player to change teams quickly. The *Front Page Sports* series has always had a clunky interface; this is a step in the right direction.

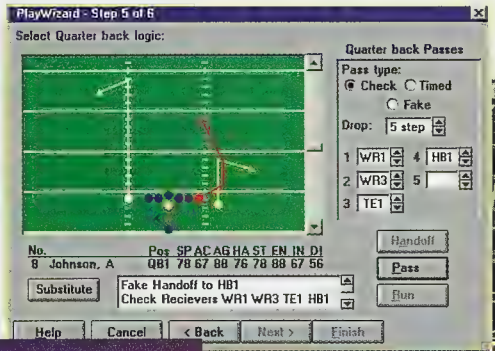
Curiously enough, the move to Windows means the game will actually require *less* memory. Running the DOS-only *Football '96* under Windows 95 required 16 megabytes of RAM, whereas *Football '97* will require only eight (of course if you're running Windows 95 with eight, you're not really running it).

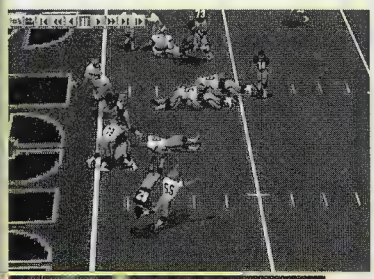
As with most of Sierra's upcoming products, multiplayer LAN and modem play is included (for two players, via DirectPlay), with their free online gaming services providing Internet connectivity (an *Imagination Network* update is being negotiated).

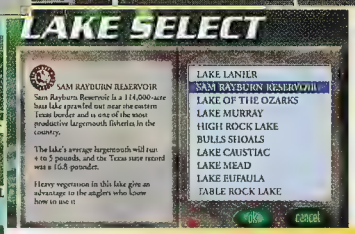
Golf will be familiar to readers who read our CES report in March when it was formerly referred to as *The Golf Club* from Headgate Software. The game features excellent graphics, with high-color, high-resolution visuals nearly equaling those found in its biggest competitor, Access' *Links LS* (curiously enough, the developers of *Golf* helped create *Links*). The most noteworthy element of the game is the unique new swing control, dubbed TrueSwing™. While there's always the requisite click-a-thon for old-timers, the new interface will provide a unique computer golf experience. Pull back on the mouse for your backswing and match the velocity and push it forward to generate your power. It's a bit tough to describe, but it's really interesting. It does require practice, but it's about time someone did something interesting with golf interfaces. The two courses shipping with the game are the Pete Dye Golf Club in Bridgeport, West Virginia and the Prince in Kauai, Hawaii. Modem and network play, with complete tournaments of human players, will be supported.

The final game here has to be the one gamers anticipate the most. Yes, it's *Trophy Bass 2*, the sequel to, believe it or not, *Trophy Bass*! If you're not into fishing, this has to be the most alien product available. If you bother to try it, it's hard not to be lured (ouch) by its many charms. The biggest improvement over the original (which, Sierra assures us has sold a lot, presumably to the previously untapped fisherman/computer user demographic) is the addition of network play, allowing tournaments where you have X game minutes to catch as many fish as possible. Even PETA members may enjoy this one.

– Steve Bauman







Clockwise from upper left: The play wizard takes the drudgery out of play creation; The onfield action is intense; Uh, fishing?; Golf anyone?

Review

Bruce Jenner's World Class Decathlon

Interactive Magic — Windows 95 — ★★★½★

Back in the 70's, kids everywhere idolized Bruce Jenner. To them, he epitomized all that their simpleton childhood dreams could fathom. Why? Because back then, Bruce was the lifelike figure on every *Wheaties* box, and what better to season a morning bowl of milk and sugar than a handful of *Wheaties* sprinkled on top?

To the rest of the world, however, Bruce was best remembered for having won the gold medal at the 1976 Olympics. Now, Interactive Magic has brought the first of several games released by different developers in the wake of the coming Olympics, *Bruce Jenner's World Class Decathlon*.

Earlier games tried to create the experience of the Decathlon by making you blud-

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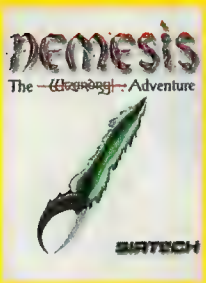


'NEMESIS: THE WIZARDRY ADVENTURE' A unique combination of elements creates rich gameplay destined to revolutionize the adventure/rpg standard. 4 CD's packed with extravagant multimedia, deliver an epic story. CD $42

'DUKE NUKEM 3D' Ass stompin' aliens have landed, and the humans suddenly find themselves atop the endangered species list. The odds are a million to one, but Duke Nukem knows what's got to be done. Kick alien butt! CD $45

'BLOOD & MAGIC' The 1st real-time, strategy computer game based on a never before seen area of the most popular AD&D world, the Forgotten Realms. You command a broad range of characters into epic battles of good and evil. CD $46

'DUNGEON KEEPER' As an ultra evil sorcerer who has collected a hoard of treasure over decades of thievery and other mischief, you now retreat into your dungeon to enjoy your unjust rewards. CD $45

'MAGIC: THE GATHERING' This top selling trading card game is now; for the first time, an interactive multiplayer online computer game. It's an addictive fantasy game featuring wizards, exploration, adventure and role playing. CD $45

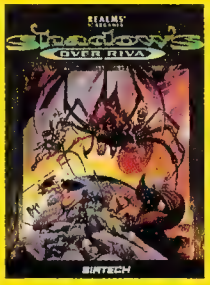
'Z' Meet Commander Zod. You'll answer to him as you lead armies of beer swilling, drunken robot soldiers from planet to planet destroying everything that stands in your way. Get off your ass, princess. This is war! CD $44

'WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET 3: AGE OF RIFLES 1848-1905' Recreates 19th century warfare and concentrates on an era where infantry and artillery were the hallmarks of the day. CD $42

'THRUSTMASTER GRAND PRIX 1' Gives you the competitive edge with variable throttle and braking at your fingertips and lightning fast thumb activated shifting. Securely clamps to your desktop. Total steering range is 180 degrees of travel. $74

'HIND' The Hind will contain a free for all arcade mode so new sim enthusiasts can jump into the cockpit & quickly enter combat action. For veteran players, Hind contains a detailed mission planner! CD $44

'CH PRODUCTS PRO THROTTLE' You can easily master the skies with this authentic left-handed throttle, modeled after the throttle found in the F-16 jet. Featuring 20 programmable functions and a three year warranty! $98



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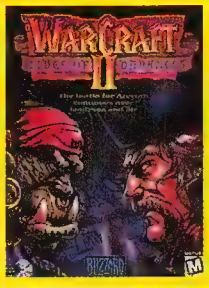

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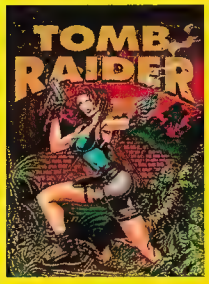

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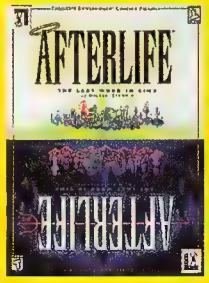

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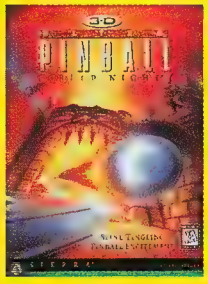

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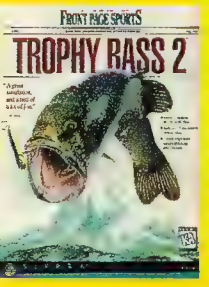

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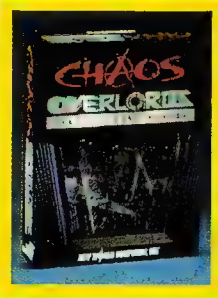

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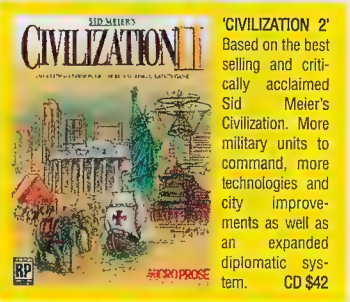

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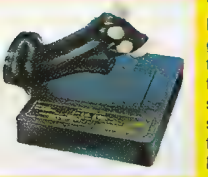

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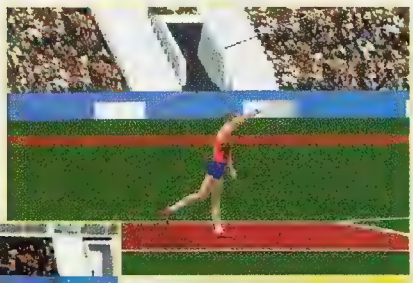
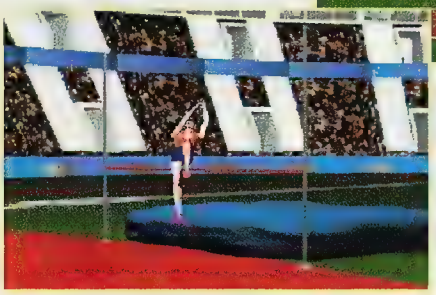
geon your spacebar into the floorboards as fast as your weakened forefingers could tap up and down on it (all in the name of creating that glorious running effect). Interactive Magic, on the other hand, has eliminated that, while adding some unique features that make this perhaps the best creation of the *spirit* of the sport yet, though not in ways you might think.

Decathlon features all ten of the events featured in the real thing. In a unique approach, you handle the events in a two day series, so the first five events comprise "Day One," while the last five occur on "Day Two." This may seem a trivial matter at first glance, but its impact will make itself clear later.





▲The key to the javelin is throwing as hard as you can toward an imaginary in-law
◀"WHACK! Got that pesky fly."

Player creation is as detailed as some CRPGs. You select the name, face, and certain event styles, but more importantly, you have a certain number of skill points at your disposal. You can divvy out these points for attributes like sprinting, weight throwing, etc. The higher the number, the better your psionic magic skills – oh, wait, I mean… your *athletic* skills are.

Creating opponents is just as easy, and you can fill the entire event with a variety of opponents and skill levels. Want to play with a bunch of guys named Tootsie who have the endurance of a gummy bear in a forest fire? Go ahead. Or perhaps you see yourself taking on Brutus and *Bruise* Jenner to hone your skills. Either way, you can pretty much tailor the field of participants any way you like.

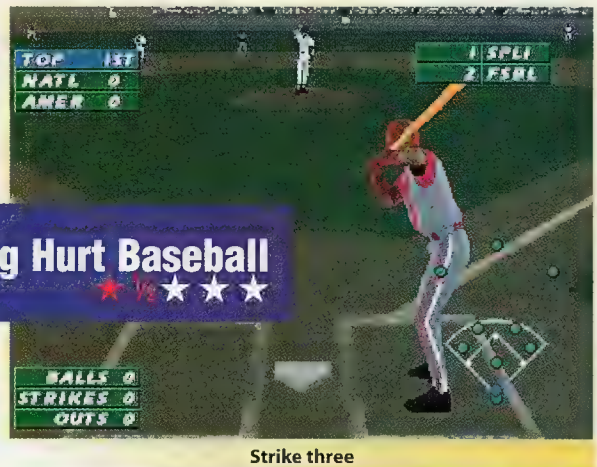
A neat feature is the Coach's Office section, an archive of lengthy videos, with Bruce reminiscing on the different events and experiences of his illustrious athletic career. However, throughout the game you're also given video sequences of Bruce explaining the techniques of each event. You may eventually turn them off, as it will get tiring after the eighth straight sequence to hear the advice, yet again, to basically "Save your endurance."

Which is where the game's distinguishing factor comes into play. *Decathlon* won't win the Golden Joystick award from the "Association of Gamers With Nothing Better To Do Than Give Out Golden Joystick Awards." No, *Decathlon* is far more mental, and far less physical finger-folk-dancing. You have a pool of endurance, which you must ration through each of the five daily events (see now why a two day race is important? Your endurance regenerates on the second day). Use all that endurance too soon, and you'll need a flashlight to see the finish line in the 1500 meter race at dusk. Save too much, and you won't have the points to even finish at all. So not only does *Decathlon* require the same skill of "click quick click quick click" that *Links 386* does, it also adds the element of strategy real life athletes must grapple with.

Even so, *Decathlon* never gets deep enough into the strategy and endurance paradigm to pull you away from the bottom line: it's a three-legged mouse race. Click once. Click twice. Click three times, and you're greeted by Auntie Em at the finish line…

For a deeply challenging game of sophistication that will have your eyebrows furrowed, and your glassy eyes staring deeply into the interlacing of your monitor, the recommendation is, "buy a book on *Fluids and Electrolytes*." But for a quick thrill ride into that mind-numbing state of gaming simplicity that we love to hate, but hate ourselves for loving, *Decathlon* is the breakfast byte of champions. – *Tim Royal*

Review
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball
Acclaim DOS ★½★★★



Strike three

Baseball, with its slow pacing, is perhaps less suited to a full-on brainless arcade treatment like that given by Acclaim's *Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball*. With no simulation mode (there's not even box scores), *Big Hurt* is judged solely for its action, and therein lies the first of its many problems. Just juicing the ball and accelerating the pitches doesn't turn this into baseball's *NBA Jam*. It lacks that game's fluid controls and simplified play; baseball turns out not to be as easy to dilute into an arcade fest as some other sports.

Big Hurt Baseball certainly has the right visual moves to succeed. From its EA Sports-style menus to its 3D on-field graphics, it's quite nice to look at (though you need major Pentium horsepower to run it in high resolution). The game shows its console roots by relying entirely on a joypad interface, but it's simple enough to navigate around.

The pitcher-batter confrontation, the most important aspect of any playable baseball game, is only partially successful. On the plus side, 90 MPH fastballs are hard to hit, and following one with a 60 MPH changeup is virtually guaranteed to throw a human player off balance (note the human player – the computer is just dumb all of the time). The biggest problem with pitching, though, is the inability to choose from more than two pitches when playing with a joystick. You have to use the keyboard to use a third pitch, which is unacceptable. A different pitch selection design is really called for, but developer Iguana chose not to implement it (all consoles are equipped with more buttons).

Batting isn't even as effective as pitching, with the viewing angle making it difficult to judge the height of a pitch. The response time, from pressing the button to swing to the actual visual representation of said swing, is also quite poor.

Once the ball gets put in play, the game gets worse. Aside from obvious problems with the layout of the various parks around the league (does Fenway's "Brown" Monster have the same ring?), visual glitches mar the 3D view, with both fly balls and players being able to run through the stands at different times. Players appear to catch the ball once it has passed them, and their animation is choppy on even the fastest machines.

Worse yet are the obvious problems with game logic. Albert Belle hit what may be the first infield homer. He hit a ball to first, the first baseman missed it, and the game transferred control to the outfielder. Unfortunately, the ball never reached the outfield, and the outfielder apparently cannot enter the infield. So the ball stayed next to the first and second baseman, while Belle circled the bases. Very surreal.

Other problems include the computer throwing ahead of the runner all of the time (fake running to third on an infield grounder – you'll draw a throw even if you're one step off, and your hitter will be safe at first). A ball that was hit out of the park suddenly became a single, computer runners do not advance even when an outfielder misses the ball, the announcer gets plays and players wrong, and, well, you get the idea.

Yup, this game hurts. – *Steve Bauman*

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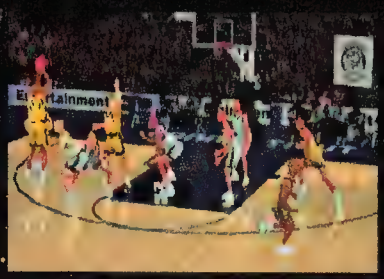
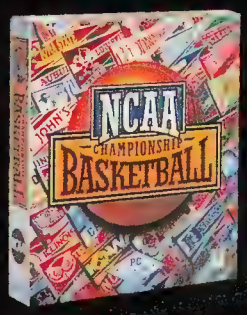


Extensive recruiting feature let's you rebuild your team after each season of play.



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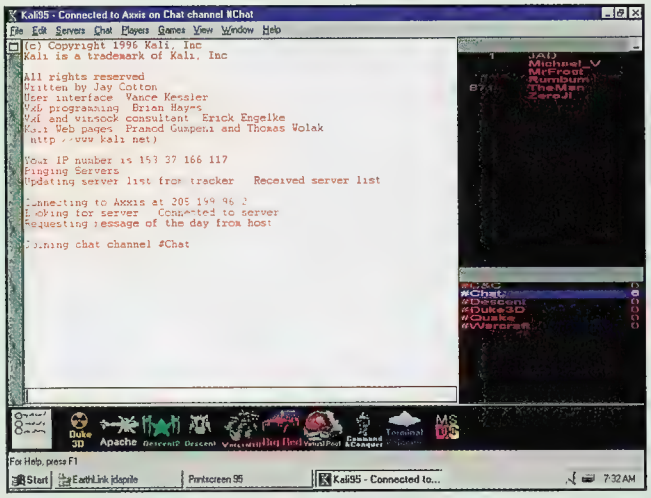
a help guide for Kali95:

where to get it, how to use it, what you need, and general tips

Kali is essentially an IPX network emulator which works over the Internet. You've probably noticed that all the new games (and many of the old ones) offer four, eight, even 16-20 player network support. And, most of you have also noticed that you don't have a network in sight. Internet gaming is cropping up everywhere, but TEN, MPath and the others are subscription services, where you can play only certain games (the ones the service gets the rights to). Kali is simply a program anyone with a SLIP/PPP (point to point protocol) ISP connection can use. And – while it's probably nearly impossible to have a full eight or 16 player game that's playable – you can definitely get some great two, three, and four player action going in some of your favorite multi-player fests, like *Duke Nukem 3D*, *NetMech*, *Warcraft II* and *Command & Conquer*. Theoretically, Kali can use any game with network capability, but this isn't always the case. Some games simply don't function with Kali, and the ones that do work, do so with varying results – results which vary from game to game and gamer to gamer.



At the current time, version g of Kali95 is the most recent update for the program (get it at the Kali ftp site, which is linked to the main website). It's still in beta, and doesn't support DirectPlay yet, so, you'll need a program called Kmech to even attempt to play games like NetMech95 and Fire Fight

where do i get kali?

http://www.axxis.com/kali, the Kali homesite, is the best place to start. Here you can find both the current version of Kali95 and KaliDOS, along with FAQs, patches and Internet links to other Kali and game-related sites. You can also purchase your Kali registration via credit card, if you like (good for any and all versions of Kali you might have). This article will focus mainly on Kali95, which is already an easy to use program; but many of the tips here work with the DOS version as well. The unregistered version of Kali cuts off after being active for 15 minutes, so after playing with it for a short time, it's well worth it to pay the $20 to have the registered version, which lets you play as long as you like.

kali basics: your ping is king

For virtually all games to work effectively, or at all, you'll want to find players who register as low a ping as possible. A ping is simply a command to find out the amount of time it takes for a signal to get from you to the other person and back through that server (a server is simply a computer used to handle Kali games). In Kali, pings are registered in milliseconds. In most cases under 500 is good, but try to stay below. To find out the ping of an individual in the Kali chatroom, simply type /ping nameofperson. To find out the ping of everyone in the chatroom, type /ping *. Unless you are dealing with gamers with a T1 connection, or have a lot of Kali gamers in your local area, don't expect too many pings lower than around 300-250; in my experience, even *that* low can be very rare. Pings fluctuate constantly as well.

If you want to play something in particular, say *Duke*, it's best to be ready to roll instantly. Know what directory the game is in (have it already open), have the CD in the drive if it is needed, etc. For *Duke*, you'd want a DOS window open, the directory opened and the setup all ready loaded. Other games – like *NetMech* and *Big Red Racing* – can have desktop shortcuts within easy reach.

Also of extreme importance is having the compatible version of any particular game. There are virtually no games out there which will connect with a lesser or greater version of the same game (*Warcraft II* is a notable exception). So, generally, it's best to have the absolute latest version of the game you want to play.

Always make sure to quit KaliChat before starting your game.

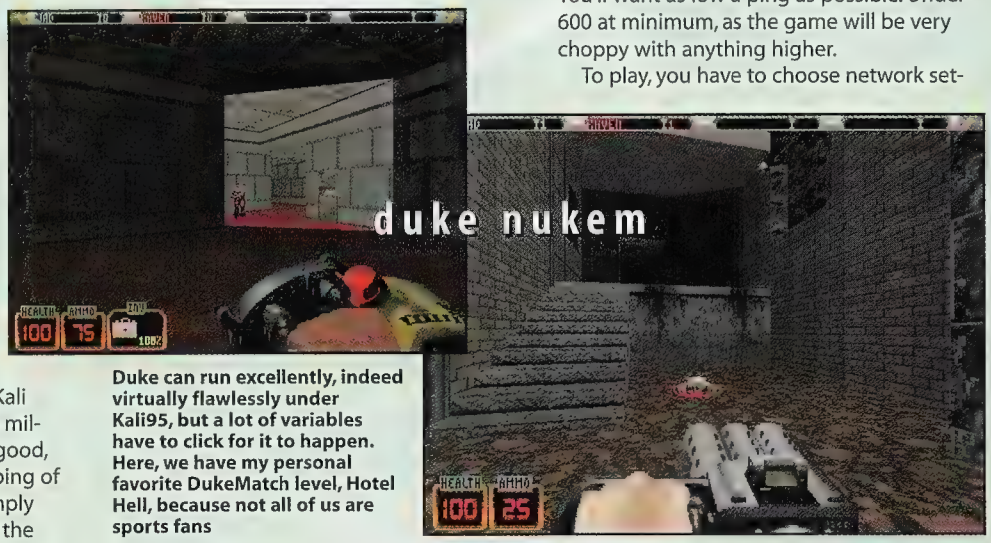
Lastly, with Kali, patience is a virtue. Many if not most games can require repeated attempts in order to play properly.

the games

Duke Nukem 3D: I have never gotten more then a three player match to work over Kali, but it is possible if the pings are low enough and luck is with you. Kali95 and later versions of DOS Kali actually have a *Duke* setting in them (it's in the advanced config options) built right in. Find out if you need it through playing. According to Kali, if you don't need it, don't turn it on. Everyone should be using it if it has to be on.

To get a *Duke* game running properly (or have a better chance of this occurring), you need to do some specific things: Open up a DOS window in Windows 95 and load up the *Duke* directory (probably "c:\duke3d"), then type "setup /f4." This is the network compatible setting which runs *Duke* most efficiently. You'll want as low a ping as possible. Under 600 at minimum, as the game will be very choppy with anything higher.

To play, you have to choose network set-



Duke can run excellently, indeed virtually flawlessly under Kali95, but a lot of variables have to click for it to happen. Here, we have my personal favorite DukeMatch level, Hotel Hell, because not all of us are sports fans

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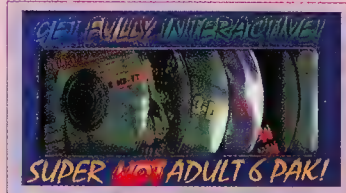

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Lag can be a real problem for NetMech like it can for any game, but a great deal of the time it runs superbly-verall, it's like having a Battletech center right in your home whenever you want it. What could be greater than that? ▼

▲ And to think you laughed at your friends who bought this one. Just try to get Screamer or Whiplash to run so smoothly (try to get them to run at all actually-they say it's possible, but I've seen no proof of it). Big Red Racing is fun, fun, fun and under Kali can support more players with more stability and playability than probably any other game around

tings from the setup menu. The players must agree upon a socket number beforehand. A socket it simply a designation to the server of where that game will take place, like a house address. Pick any number you like, just make sure the socket number you choose isn't already in use. Next, choose "players" to tell the game how many will be playing. If you choose three when you only have two, the game will look forever for that third man. When you have the settings resolved, you run directly from the network launch option. You might also want to turn the music off; this often improves performance, especially under Windows 95. To do so, just pick "none" in the music card setting.

Duke is a hard game to get player sync with; this is usually why most games don't start, or start, then get errors, lock-up, or just play badly. To help combat these "sync" errors, do a couple of things: let the opening title/demo screens load through without interruption (but press the spacebar on that TEN warning screen), then when the game actually starts, wait between 20-30 seconds to help the game get into synchronization. People have also suggested that chatting might hurt the play, though they may have meant just at the start. It's hard to tell. Another thing to watch for is that *Duke* has a real tendency to keep looking for other players in four, five, or more player matches.

NetMech: This networked version of *MechWarrior 2* is a cinch to work most of the time; just find where there are Mechers (GC NetMech is always a good place) and either hang around the Kali chatroom there or load up *NetMech* directly and chat from there. The game can be very choppy and jumpy, and you can't ping from within it. Packet loss often occurs (true with *Descent* as well); the result is unwanted invulnerability, Mech disappearance and other unsightly stuff. *NetMech* can and will run well most of the time, but the Windows 95 version requires a program called *KMech*, which sets up a direct connection with another gamer acting as the server, and requires the registered version of Kali to work. Last tip here is that if you get video lines or distortion on your screen when playing, right click on the *NetMech* file, choose properties, then screen and under the "usage" heading click on window instead of full screen.

Big Red Racing: This runs superbly over Kali most of the time – even with less than sterling pings, sometimes. The reason is that the game can guess a player's positioning at any given point; its simplistic polygonal engine helps as well. To run the game over Kali, use the file "racing.exe" to load it. Do not use the "winrace" file, because the game will not work at all, in fact may lock-up severely. Make a racing.exe desktop shortcut for ease of use. Make sure everyone picks the right number of players from the main menu.

Warcraft II: There is patch specifically made to enhance its speed over Kali (called *War2Kali*) and you'll want this if you intend to play it. Pretty simple to get started. Once you have found your players, load up the game. For patch users, start the game from the *War2Kali* patch (again, make a desktop shortcut for it). When you get to the main menu, choose Multiplayer, then network, define your game characteristics and launch into *Warcraft*.

Command & Conquer: First off, as of this writing there is no legitimate patch to make *C&C* run faster over Kali. There is a file called cckali, but it was apparently some sort of sick joke, and usually contains a virus, according to Jay Cotton (who designed Kali). Overall, *Command & Conquer* runs on the slow side over Kali, so low pings are a necessity. Try to stay under 550. To play, after finding other players (two-four), load *C&C* (rungame.exe is the file), choose multiplayer, then network, then either "join" if you are joining someone else's game or "new" if you are starting your own new game. Like most games, there are several revisions of *C&C* floating around (between 1.07 and 1.20), and you'll need compatible version numbers with all players. *Covert Ops* players automatically have version 1.20.

–jason d'aprile

◀ Get the War2Kali patch and watch out! WarCraft II runs incredibly when the players have good pings, which may mean that some of you might never leave the house again. So, register your Kali and remember to stock up on needed necessary household items and foodstuffs before you start playing

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Letter of the Month

You have a picture of top secret work in progress on your August 1996 cover. This is obviously (A) a picture of the new M2 series tank; (B) an M-1A1 designed for left-handed tank commanders; (C) the result of flipping the negative.

As an Army photojournalist for four years and a tank platoon leader for six, I'd go with (C).

Christopher A. McNair
1LT, AR, AL ARNG

All the result of our having photographed the tank from inside a different dimension. Apologies to all concerned, especially left-handed tank commanders whose hopes were raised (and now dashed). - ed.

The Great Debate continues

Now that *Quake* is out, here's a quick suggestion for a future article - *Quake* vs. *Duke Nukem 3D*! *[And so it begins.. right here.. written by yourselves. -ed]*

My opinions:

Duke Nukem 3D is more frilly than *Quake* - there's more scenery and the environment responds a bit more. In *Quake* there are no posters, no pool tables, no toilets, no mirrors, no destroyable walls. But *Quake* is more of a purist's game. Nothing in *Nukem 3D* can compare to a four-player *Quake* DeathMatch (not even speaking of 16-player!). *Quake*'s enemies are far superior to *Nukem*'s, which I found to be too cartoony and stupid.

And, of course, there's the matter of the lack of sprites. I still don't think I've seen all the death scenes in *Quake*, for enemies or for other players in multiplayer. It's gorgeous.

In other words, *Quake* beats out *Duke* completely. While it's missing some things - some more environmental interaction, a la the bathrooms/pool tables/etc in Duke would be nice, I'm not complaining at all.

The big question: What about *Prey*? Do you guys have any info about this "Quake-killer"?

Sincerely,
Brandon Wu
nightstryke@juno.com

I downloaded Quake shareware Saturday night, and after playing it a few times, I can say that I was not really impressed. Here are some good points:
1) True 3D engine.
2) The Zombies, Dogs, and Big Boss are excellent.
3) Excellent screens up to 360x240 on my machine (Quantex P90 SM).
4) The Monsters "gibbed" *[gibbered? Hmm...]* real good.
5) The Monster AI is an improvement from other games.

Now, here are some bad points:
1) The shareware sure has an awful lot of brown in it.
2) There is no "use" function.
3) The level design seems lacking.
4) Any resolution above 360x240 really bogs down on my machine.
5) There is no mapping feature (I'm sorry, I miss it).
6) There is little level interaction with the player.
7) The game does not seem as immersive as Doom or Duke3D.
8) The weapons are not that great.
9) There is no useable inventory. You have to use an item right away or you lose it (except for weapons, of course).

Quake (or should I say *Doom 3D?*) is a good game, but id seems to have designed it with only Deathmatch in mind. Additionally, id over-hyped their game. If you read the reports of what they wanted to put in the game, and what has ended up in this shareware, you can only be disappointed.

I will still buy the final version of *Quake* (which should make id happy), and I hope that it is an improvement over the shareware, but this is not the game that id, a lot of gaming magazines, and *Quake* web sites are saying is one of the greatest games ever.

Thanks for listening to a game player.

Michael W. Harris
mharris@surfsouth.com

What can we say?! You're both right, so there! Read the review on page 84 and send in your hate mail/love letters about it to splus@together.net - ed.

No Lack of Good Ideas Redux

I feel compelled to reply to Mr. Eisler's letter in the August issue. He stated "no more F-16" sims, which I would have whole heartedly agreed to a year or two ago. I think *US Navy Fighters* and the *Marine Fighters* expansion disk did much to make me forget about *Falcon*, et al. Then came *EF2000* and now we have *ATF*. To top this all off, we now have *Longbow* (yeah, yeah, a helicopter sim, but a very good flight sim, nonetheless, I think we all would agree). *Longbow* has made me forget all about *Comanche* and *LHX*.

Speaking of old games, what about *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*? EXACTLY! *Yeager* answers ideas two and three of Mr. Eisler's letter. In *Yeager* you could fly F-86s against MiG-15s (I prefer it the other way around!) and F-4s against MiG-21s and MiG-17s (I have spent soooo much time pulling hammerheads on F-4s in those scenarios). Let's take a look at that copyright date: 1991! My only complaint is the lack of rudder control, which detracts greatly for me when dogfighting with guns. If you want rudder control there was always *JetFighter 2*, which as I recall was one of the first 256 color VGA games. Also, *Birds of Prey* was around which allowed the flight simmer a multitude of aircraft to fly, as in *ATF*. I don't know about the tank sims, but I thought I would remind everyone that *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* did exist for us a several years ago when *Falcon* was, how do those English guys put it, "the dog's bollocks!"

Sincerely,
Tom Mizer
Gainesville, FL

People who know their gaming history definitely have a leg up on this stuff; thanks for sharing your insights with us. - ed.

The big score

Contributor Tim Royal obviously spent too much time reading our E3 report in August. He's compiled this little list for your amusement.

Tim's E3 Round-Up Critique and Analysis Specifically Using Absolutely No Spreadsheet in Order to Achieve Figures

	1995	1996
Games previewed:	342	324
3D and/or First Person Perspective	78	113
Actual references to the word "3D"	54	90
Games I felt I'd look into buying	68	72
Games I gotta have	49	47
Sneaky, dry, or sarcastic remarks	62	76
Beavis and/or Butt-head coverage	1 paragraph	2 mentions

Games in both 1995 and 1996 coverage – 113

So as you see, with the exception of the ramping down of Beavis and Butt-head coverage, you've improved in every single category. The number of 3D games, of course, seems to be growing disproportionately, but that was expected, and thankfully they'll all die choking on their self-made noose of mediocrity.

Tim Royal

Thanks Tim. We intentionally toned down the Beavis and Butt-head coverage due to the sheer volume of complaints we received for using the word "Beavis." It's very offensive to some people, y'know? Of course the funniest stat is the last one. Scary, eh?

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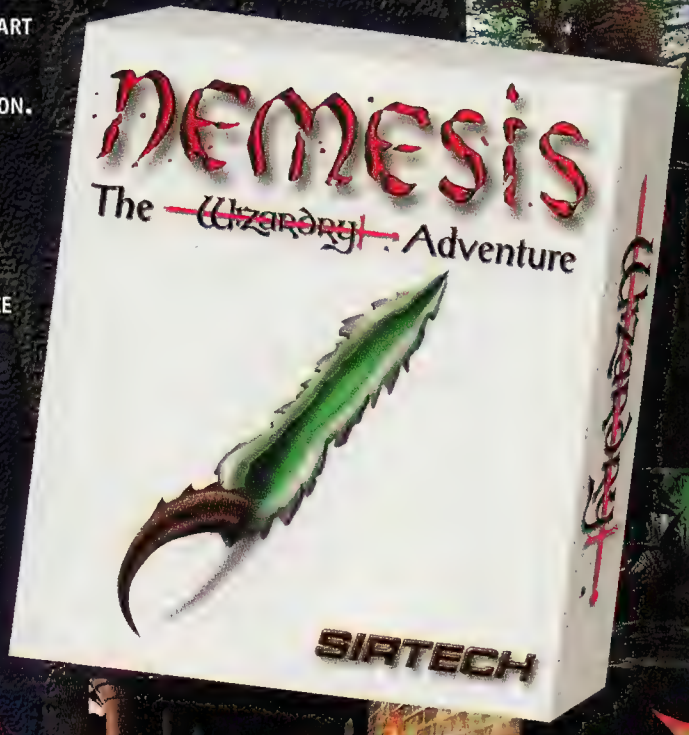

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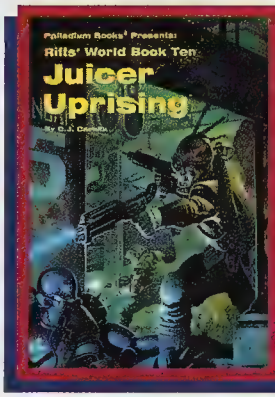

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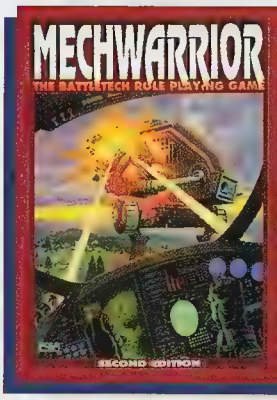

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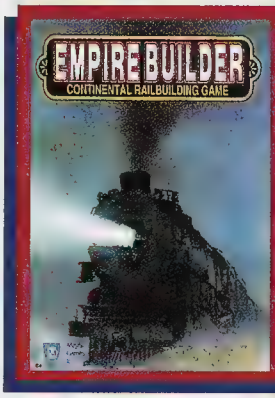

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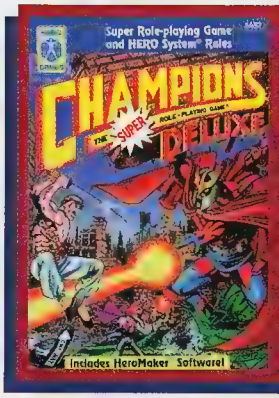

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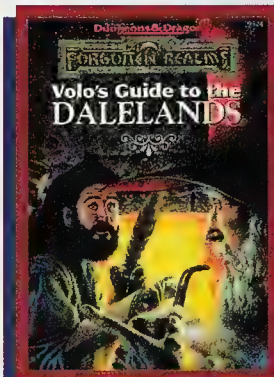

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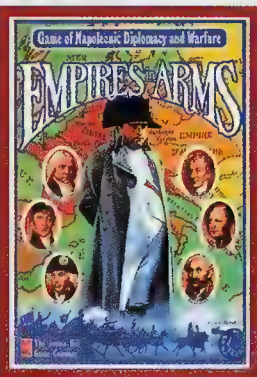

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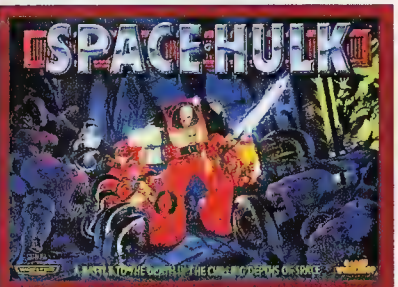

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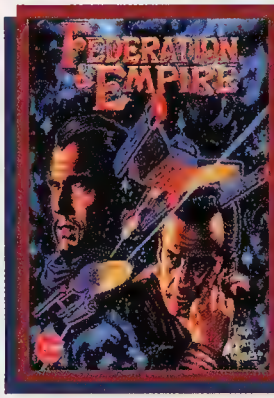

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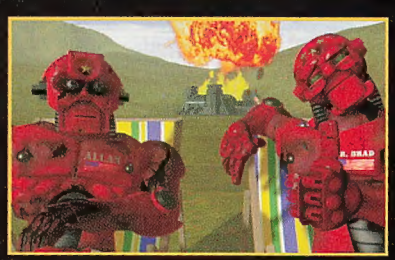

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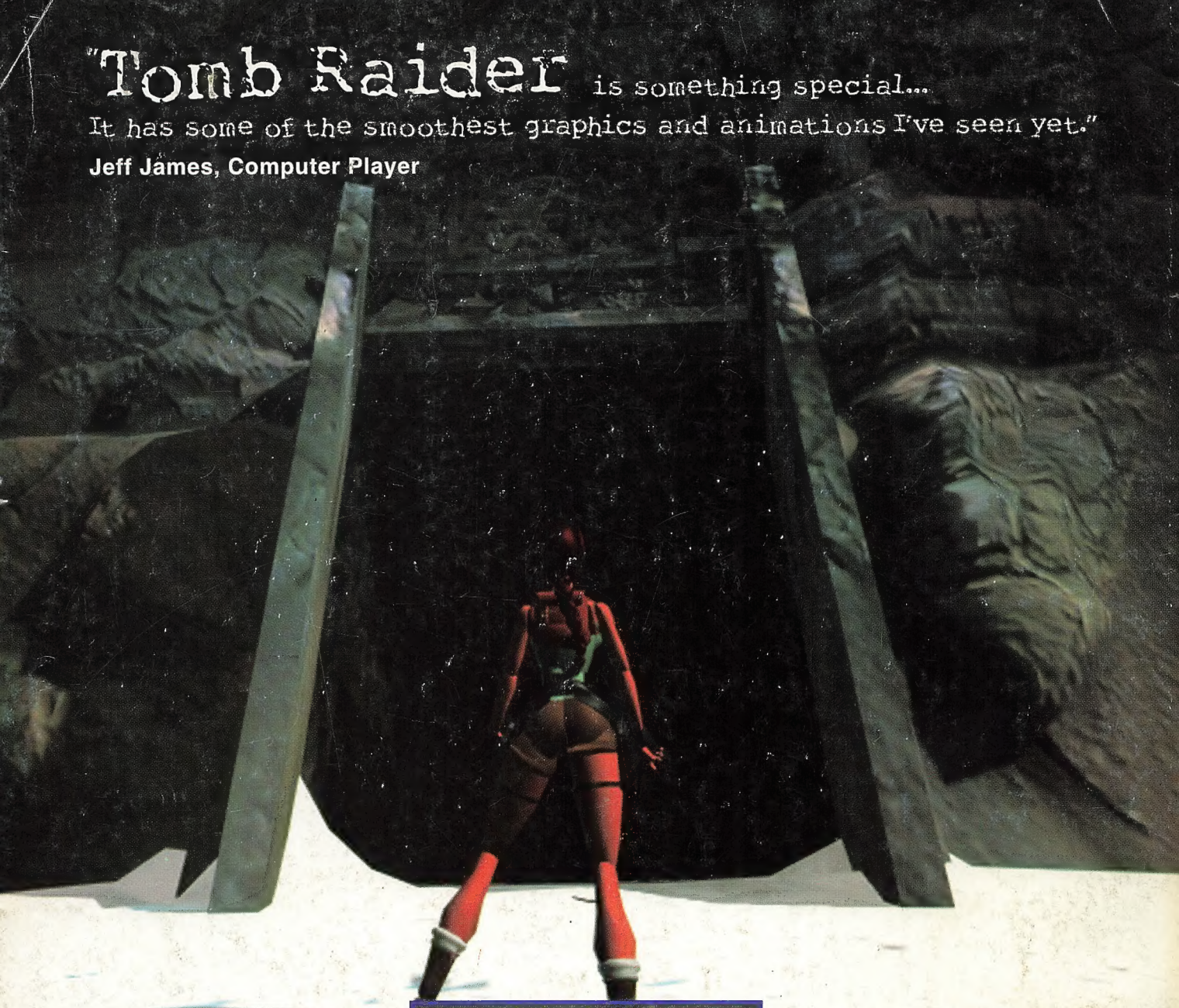

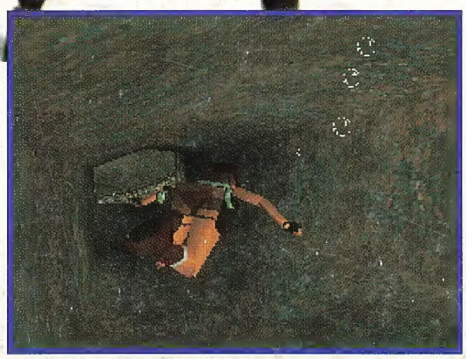

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PlayStation Saturn PC-CD

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